



# Exploring Refugees' Intentions to Return to Ukraine

Data Insights and Policy Responses

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This publication was made possible through support provided by the US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM).

Publisher: International Organization for Migration  
Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe,  
Eastern Europe and Central Asia  
Dampfschiffstrasse 4/10-11  
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Design: Sara Staedicke, MPI  
Layout: Katie O'Hara  
Cover Photo: IOM/Alexandra Apețean

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Suggested citation: Sohst, Ravenna, Tino Tirado, Lucía Salgado and Jasmijn Slotjes. 2024. *Exploring Refugees' Intentions to Return to Ukraine: Data Insights and Policy Responses*. Brussels and Geneva: Migration Policy Institute Europe and International Organization for Migration.

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December 2024



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## Executive Summary

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 triggered Europe's largest displacement crisis since World War II, with more than 6 million people fleeing to other European countries. In response, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the first time, granting protection and access to housing, the labour market, education and other services to refugees from Ukraine. Non-EU countries also opened their doors, including the Republic of Moldova, which adopted its own temporary protection status.

*Policymakers in countries hosting refugees are faced with questions about whether to invest in further integration measures and/or to help refugees prepare for return and reintegration, once conditions in Ukraine allow it.*

The activation of temporary protection measures and outpouring of public solidarity helped welcome refugees, but more than two years on, hopes for a quick resolution to the conflict have faded. With the TPD's protection for this group currently set to expire in March 2026, their long-term future is uncertain, and policymakers in countries hosting refugees are faced with questions about whether to invest in further integration measures and/or to help refugees prepare for return and reintegration, once conditions in Ukraine allow it.

Some refugees are already returning to Ukraine, despite the ongoing war. As of April 2024, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that about 1.2 million Ukrainians had returned to Ukraine. While most only visit briefly, to see family or tend to their property, others return with the intention of staying permanently. These trends raise questions for European and Ukrainian policymakers about the likely scale and drivers of future returns, and how to adapt their policies to prepare for these movements.

This study, resulting from collaboration between IOM and the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe), contributes to filling this evidence gap. By using advanced statistical methods, it explores how personal circumstances, host-country conditions and conditions in Ukraine shape refugees' intentions to return or remain abroad. In doing so, the study is able to explore differences in refugees' return intentions across 10 Central and Eastern European countries and the extent to which host-country reception conditions (including economic conditions and support measures for displaced Ukrainians) may explain these differences. The central data source, the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region (conducted 2022–2023), is the largest and most internationally comparable source of information on return intentions among refugees from Ukraine in Central and Eastern Europe.

### BOX 1 Who are refugees from Ukraine?

In this report, the term "refugees from Ukraine" is used to describe anyone who has fled Ukraine due to the 2022 invasion by the Russian Federation. This reflects their circumstances rather than their specific legal status; some have applied for asylum and received refugee status, but the majority hold other legal statuses, namely temporary protection. This displaced population includes both Ukrainian nationals and nationals of other countries who were living in Ukraine (third-country nationals). The statistical analysis largely focuses on Ukrainians, but some sections consider third-country nationals or the overall displaced population.

The analysis shows that, despite the ongoing war and heavy destruction in some communities, many Ukrainian refugees do hope to return to Ukraine. Across the 10 study countries, 15 per cent of surveyed Ukrainians had concrete plans to return in the near term, and the vast majority (91%) hoped to return to Ukraine in the long term, once it is safe. There is, however, considerable variation in return intentions across host countries, particularly when it comes to returning in the short term. In Poland and Czechia, more than 40 per cent of refugees were planning a return trip in the near future, compared to just 1 per cent in the Republic of Moldova.

Based on the statistical analysis, the following key findings emerge about the drivers of these differing return intentions:

- ▶ **Return intentions among Ukrainian refugees are heavily influenced by conditions in Ukraine, with improved safety emerging as the key enabler for return plans.** When asked about their reasons for planning to return in the short term, improved security conditions were the single most important reason cited by respondents (28%). Analysis of the intensity of the war in respondents' regions of origin confirms this strong link between levels of security in Ukrainian communities and refugees' plans to return, both in the short and the long term. This underscores the critical need for reconstruction and recovery efforts as a prerequisite for sustainable return.
- ▶ **Comprehensive host-country support for refugees from Ukraine could both promote further integration and increase refugees' capacity to return and reintegrate – a potential win-win situation for refugees, host communities and Ukraine.** Multivariate analysis showed a strong link between supportive host-country policies (in terms of educational, health and social services) and increased refugee intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term. Similarly, intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term were higher in host countries with more favourable economic conditions, such as lower levels of poverty and higher gross domestic product (GDP). These findings suggest that return intentions might be best understood as a reflection of refugees' capacity, in terms of stability and financial resources, to plan a return – capacity that can be strengthened by robust support and economic conditions in host countries.
- ▶ **Personal circumstances, particularly employment, can outweigh the influence of other factors and reduce intentions to return.** Ukrainians who were formally employed in their host country were on average 12 percentage points less likely to say they had plans to return to Ukraine in the near future than those who were not. Similarly, employment-related support in host countries, unlike health and education support measures, was not linked to increased return intentions. Refugees who had children or older dependants in their household were also less likely to state an intention to return to Ukraine, likely due to the unpredictability of the war and related concerns about their family members' safety and access to needed services.
- ▶ **Relatively few displaced third-country nationals intend to return to Ukraine, pointing to a need to manage secondary movements and improve pathways to legal status.** Only 3 per cent of surveyed third-country nationals expressed an intention to return to Ukraine in the near future, while 27 per cent said they would remain in their host country and 70 per cent planned to move onward – either to their country of origin or another destination. The sizeable share planning to move

onward likely reflects the significant legal uncertainty surrounding this population, since many do not benefit from temporary protection. To reduce their risk of falling into irregular status or engaging in unmanaged secondary movements, priority should be given to improving access to legal status (such as by helping displaced international students apply for a visa to study in their host country) and facilitating third-country nationals' return to their origin countries, where this is a safe option.

Overall, the observed patterns highlight the diversity of future mobility plans among people displaced from Ukraine. While many Ukrainians hope to return to their country at some point, there is unlikely to be a large-scale, one-off return movement once the war ends. Instead, return will be gradual, with some refugees already planning to return – though the

IOM survey data do not indicate whether these are short visits or longer-term settlement plans. This pattern underscores the importance of proactively managing return movements, including by supporting refugees who need to travel. In addition, the destruction left behind by the war will continue to constrain refugees' desire and ability to return for years to come. In the meantime, many will have established personal and professional ties in their host countries that they will hope to maintain, whether through continued residence, frequent visits or other means. Consequently, policymakers in Ukraine and other European countries should seek to continue to support refugees, as a means to both facilitate their integration into local communities and to strengthen their capacity to return to and reintegrate in Ukraine once it is safe, along with designing flexible policies to manage increased movement back and forth from Ukraine. These elements combined will help support the well-being of refugees and their host communities, the future reconstruction of Ukraine and the development of strong links between Ukraine and its European neighbours.

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## 1 Introduction

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On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and triggered the largest and fastest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II. Close to 1 million people crossed the Ukrainian border within the first two weeks, and by September 2024, more than 6 million were estimated to have fled Ukraine to other European countries.<sup>1</sup> In response, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in early March 2022, the first time it had done so since the directive was adopted two decades earlier. This unprecedented move gave those fleeing the war immediate access to protection and a set of rights, including freedom of movement across EU territory as well as access to housing, the labour market, education and other social benefits.<sup>2</sup> The Republic of Moldova, a non-EU country, also provided immediate protection to refugees from Ukraine and later activated its own national temporary protection status.

1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Operational Data Portal, "Ukraine Refugee Situation", accessed 16 September 2024.

2 At the end of June 2023, there were more than 4 million beneficiaries of temporary protection in the European Union. See Eurostat, "Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection at the End of the Month by Citizenship, Age and Sex – Monthly Data [migr\_asytpsm]", accessed 4 September 2023.



In many of the European countries receiving displaced Ukrainians and third-country nationals (TCNs), reception and integration services were already stretched thin. In the European Union, the number of asylum applications had been on the rise since mobility rebounded from the pandemic slowdown, and the swift displacement of large numbers of refugees from Ukraine coupled with capacity crunches in housing availability, child care and health care made it difficult for authorities to meet all needs. Still, governments quickly mobilized to support these refugees. They also tested new approaches, such as fast-tracking the recognition of newcomers' educational and professional qualifications to promote their labour market integration and tailoring integration courses to different needs.<sup>3</sup> In the early days following the 2022 invasion, a wave of public solidarity and volunteer support played a major role in helping authorities to step up reception capacity and fill gaps.<sup>4</sup> However, the type and degree of support available to displaced people have differed across host countries.

More than two years on, European countries are struggling to transition from an emergency response to a long-term strategy. Initially, hopes were high among refugees that the war would end quickly and they would be able to go home. During the first year following the invasion, many children thus remained in the Ukrainian educational system and registered for remote classes. Thousands of host-country citizens also opened their homes to refugees from Ukraine, with the assumption that it would be a temporary arrangement. Yet, with no clear end to the war in sight, it is difficult to say whether refugees will stay or return to Ukraine, and on what timeline. The EU Justice and Home Affairs Council reached an agreement on 13 June 2024 to extend the TPD until March 2026.<sup>5</sup> However, broader uncertainty about the future makes it difficult for policymakers across Europe to plan ahead and to decide whether to invest more heavily in refugees' long-term integration into host communities or in measures to support their eventual return to Ukraine, once conditions allow it.

Data collection efforts to date have fostered understanding of how many people would potentially like to return to Ukraine and what their characteristics are.<sup>6</sup> Yet, crucial information about what is shaping those return intentions is lacking, which complicates efforts to design effective policies and strategies to support displaced Ukrainians and their host communities. This study aims to help fill this gap by examining the factors behind refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine or stay abroad. It takes a unique 360-degree approach by considering not only personal and household characteristics but also the reception conditions and support policies in host countries and the economic conditions and security situation in refugees' regions of origin in Ukraine. In doing so, this study contributes to existing research by 1) employing advanced regression analysis that captures how factors interact to shape return intentions, 2) linking data

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- 3 Daria Huss, "5 Takeaways on Fast Tracking the Labour Market Integration of Ukrainian Refugees" (fact sheet, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 6 December 2022).
  - 4 For example, an International Organization for Migration (IOM) initiative in Lithuania that encouraged Lithuanians to get to know Ukrainians living in their country through social exchanges demonstrated that Lithuanians' actions have helped many Ukrainians recover and find a safe, temporary place in Lithuania. See IOM, "New Breakfast Initiative Brings Ukrainians in Lithuania Closer to Host Community" (news release, 7 November 2023).
  - 5 European Council, "Justice and Home Affairs Council (Home Affairs), 13 June 2024—Protection for Ukrainian Refugees", updated 13 June 2024.
  - 6 Other surveys include: UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees, Refugee Returnees and IDPs from Ukraine, Regional Intentions Report #5* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2024); Hlib Vyshlinskyi, Dariia Mykhailyshyna, Maksym Samoiliuk and Mariia Tomilina, "Ukrainian Refugees: How Many Are There, Their Intentions & Return Prospects. Second Wave", Centre for Economic Strategy, September 2023; Опора, "Медіаспоживання Та Громадсько-політична Активність Українців За Кордоном", accessed 16 September 2024.

on refugees' return intentions from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region<sup>7</sup> (see Box 2) with nine other datasets on conditions in host countries and regions of origin, 3) developing a unique policy index capturing support policies for refugees from Ukraine, and 4) exploring how different factors' impact on return intentions may vary across host countries and demographic groups. The analysis focuses on 10 Eastern and Central European countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>8</sup>

The report begins by sketching the story of displacement from Ukraine and the response in Europe (Section 2), before exploring return dynamics to Ukraine to date and related policy decision-making (Section 3). The report then, in Section 4, delves into analysis of IOM data to describe refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine in the future, and what individual, host-country and origin-country factors can affect return intentions. The report concludes by providing recommendations for European and Ukrainian policymakers, international organizations and civil-society actors regarding their ongoing response to displacement from Ukraine and their approach to managing possible returns.

## BOX 2

### About this study and the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region

This report is the result of collaboration between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) to analyse the factors shaping the return intentions of Ukrainian refugees, based on approximately 60,800 interviews conducted between April 2022 and December 2023 as part of the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region. In addition, a smaller part of the analysis looks at the intentions of third-country nationals, based on approximately 1,700 interviews. The survey is the largest and most internationally comparable source of information on return intentions among refugees from Ukraine and allows for a nuanced analysis of displaced individuals' intentions to return in the short and long term.

The survey data are complemented with information about conditions in refugees' host countries (e.g. indicators of unemployment, economic prosperity and inequality); conditions in Ukrainian oblasts\* (e.g. the intensity of the war in these regions and their distance to the host country); and policy responses in host countries (e.g. measures implemented to support refugees from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive or, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, national protection policies). This multilevel data analysis makes it possible to assess the relative influence of individual, country-level and policy factors in shaping return intentions.

More information about the data sources and methodology used in this study can be found in the Appendix.

\* An oblast is an administrative region in Ukraine, governed by a regional council. The country is divided into 27 first-order administrative divisions, consisting of 24 oblasts (regions), 1 autonomous republic (the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), and 2 cities with special status (the City of Kyiv and the City of Sevastopol).

<sup>7</sup> This survey was formerly known as the Needs, Intentions and Integration Challenges Survey.

<sup>8</sup> The IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region collected data in 12 countries, the 10 countries listed here plus Belarus and Türkiye. Since this report focuses, among other things, on the impact of support offered to refugees from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), Türkiye and Belarus were excluded because of their very different policy contexts. The Republic of Moldova is the only non-EU country in this sample and is included because it implemented its own temporary protection status that closely resembles the status provided in the European Union.

## 2 Ukrainian Displacement in Europe: Present and Future Prospects

As of September 2024, more than 6 million refugees were estimated to have fled Ukraine to Europe, mainly women and children.<sup>9</sup> This section explores how the European Union, nine EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Republic of Moldova have responded to this displacement crisis. It also examines the considerable uncertainty surrounding the future of refugees from Ukraine.

### A. *The historic activation of the Temporary Protection Directive*

The February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the subsequent mass displacement situation came at a time when migration and asylum systems in the European Union were already struggling to keep pace with growing arrivals and asylum applications. These challenges have been longstanding, from the crisis in 2015 and 2016 to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and persisting capacity crunches in reception and asylum systems. Meanwhile, Member States could not agree on the future of the Common European Asylum System, the legal framework that aims to harmonize national asylum policies, and negotiations over its reform were stalled between 2016 and 2023.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of these political and operational challenges, the EU response to displacement from Ukraine was unprecedented. Less than two weeks after the invasion, on 4 March 2022, the European Council agreed to activate the TPD, a policy instrument that was created in 2001 but that had never before been used.<sup>11</sup> The TPD granted immediate protection to Ukrainians and some eligible TCNs displaced after 24 February 2022,<sup>12</sup> as well as access to social and economic rights, for a maximum duration of three years.<sup>13</sup> These benefits include access to accommodation, assistance in terms of social welfare and sustenance, medical care and support for those who have special needs (e.g. unaccompanied minors and survivors of torture or other forms of violence). The TPD also grants children access to national education systems under the same

9 In addition, 3.6 million were recorded as internally displaced as of August 2024. See UNHCR Operational Data Portal, "Ukraine Refugee Situation"; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), "Ukraine", accessed 16 September 2024.

10 The Pact on Migration and Asylum, the legal framework that defines the future of the Common European Asylum System, was finally adopted in May 2024, after eight years of negotiations.

11 The directive had not previously been activated because Member States had not been able to agree on its use. See Hanne Beirens, Sheila Maas, Salvatore Petronella and Maurice van der Velden, *Study on the Temporary Protection Directive* (Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2016).

12 According to a Council decision on 4 March 2022, temporary protection shall be applied to three categories of people: Ukrainian nationals displaced on or after 24 February 2022 and their family members, nationals of other third countries who were residing in Ukraine and were displaced by the war and their family members, and stateless persons and third-country nationals who were residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and who are unable to return safely to their countries of origin. The decision also grants Member States the discretionary power to extend the scope of temporary protection to other groups, such as those who fled Ukraine before 24 February 2022 or all third-country nationals residing in Ukraine, irrespective of their status there or whether they can return safely to their country of origin. See European Commission, "Communication from the Commission on Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Council Implementing Decision 2022/382 Establishing the Existence of a Mass Influx of Displaced Persons from Ukraine within the Meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/5, and Having the Effect of Introducing Temporary Protection" (2022/C 126 I/01, 21 March 2022).

13 The TPD was initially activated for one year and was then extended to three years.

conditions as host-country residents and access to the general education system for adults.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, TPD beneficiaries are allowed to move freely inside the European Union and to decide in which country to register. Since the activation of the TPD, the largest numbers of refugees from Ukraine have moved to Germany and Poland, followed by Czechia, Spain, Bulgaria, Italy and Romania.<sup>15</sup>

The activation of the TPD was widely celebrated as a signal of European unity in the face of the influx of refugees from Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> There are several reasons this particular situation triggered the first-ever activation of the TPD. First, Ukraine is a neighbouring country to the European Union and people were already fleeing to Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Romania in large numbers, facilitated not only by proximity but also by the fact that Ukrainians have a right to enter and stay in the European Union for 90 days without a visa. The TPD, by granting temporary protection to those arriving, quickly provided an alternative form of protection to people who might otherwise apply for asylum, preventing the collapse of already-stretched asylum systems.<sup>17</sup> Politically, the move was also a way to show support for refugees from Ukraine and opposition to the attack by the Russian Federation.

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Member States, when deciding to activate the TPD, also underlined the cultural, ethnic and religious similarities between Ukrainians and host societies.<sup>18</sup> This sense of familiarity was reinforced by the fact that a large Ukrainian diaspora was already present in Europe, with 1.57 million Ukrainians legally residing in the European Union at the end of 2021.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the composition of the displaced population, comprised mostly of women and children, fit the image some people have of “deserving refugees”, which boosted public support for welcoming them.<sup>20</sup>

## The Ukrainian displacement situation

Compared to the previous period of heightened humanitarian arrivals in Europe in 2015 and 2016, displacement from Ukraine was larger in scale, more rapid and had a different geographic impact. While Syrian refugees arriving in Europe in 2015–2016 mostly transited through South-Eastern Europe to reach other EU destinations, many refugees from Ukraine actually settled in these and other Eastern European countries, in order to stay close to Ukraine. Poland, for instance, hosted almost 1 million refugees from

14 Council of the European Union, “Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on Minimum Standards for Giving Temporary Protection in the Event of a Mass Influx of Displaced Persons and on Measures Promoting a Balance of Efforts between Member States in Receiving Such Persons and Bearing the Consequences Thereof”, *Official Journal of the European Communities* L 212/12, 7 August 2001.

15 European Council and Council of the European Union, “Refugees from Ukraine in the EU”, accessed 8 February 2024.

16 Marie De Somer and Alberto-Horst Neidhardt, *EU Responses to Ukrainian Arrivals – Not (Yet) a Blueprint* (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2022).

17 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, M. Murat Erdoğan and Lucía Salgado, *Confronting Compassion Fatigue: Understanding the Arc of Public Support for Displaced Populations in Turkey, Colombia, and Europe* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2024).

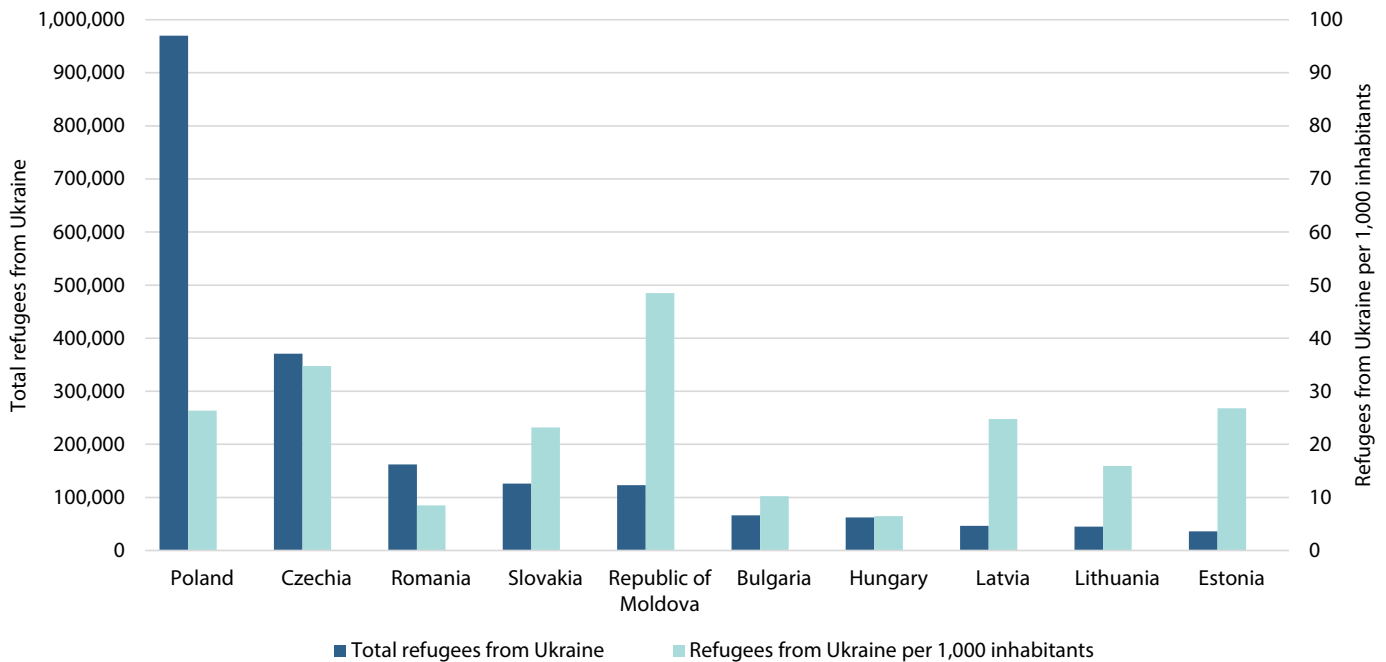
18 Alexandru D. Moise, James Dennison and Hanspeter Kriesi, “European Attitudes to Refugees after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine”, *West European Politics* 47, no. 2 (2023): 356–381.

19 Eurostat, “Ukrainian Citizens in the EU”, updated November 2022.

20 Carmen González Enríquez, “The Welcome Given to Ukrainian Refugees: Some Challenges and Uncertainties”, Real Instituto Elcano, 18 April 2022.

Ukraine as of July 2024, welcoming the second largest number after Germany. Other EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Czechia, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Baltic countries, have also welcomed large numbers of refugees. The Republic of Moldova, meanwhile, hosted the largest number of refugees from Ukraine compared to the size of its population (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Number of refugees from Ukraine in the 10 European countries of study, mid-2024\***



\* The totals in this figure reflect the latest data available for each country, ranging between July and September 2024.

Sources: Authors' analysis based on data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Operational Data Portal, "Ukraine Refugee Situation", accessed 16 September 2024; World Bank, "DataBank", accessed 16 September 2024.

## Implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive in Central and Eastern Europe

While the TPD was formulated to provide beneficiaries with immediate protection and a standard set of rights across the European Union, its implementation has been uneven. The support available for refugees from Ukraine has differed significantly across countries in terms of reception conditions, language courses, qualifications recognition and financial support, among other things, and has evolved since the activation of the directive. Such differences are evident across the 10 countries featured in this report: nine EU Member States and the Republic of Moldova, which granted a similar national temporary protection status to refugees from Ukraine (see Section 2.B.).

The provision of accommodation exemplifies these diverging levels of support. The TPD mandates that Member States ensure beneficiaries have access to suitable accommodation or, where necessary, receive the means to access housing.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the type, conditions and duration of accommodation provided to

<sup>21</sup> Council of the European Union, "Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001".

refugees from Ukraine as well as the support to help refugees search for private housing have differed widely between countries. For instance, Poland, Bulgaria and Slovakia provide accommodation to refugees from Ukraine only for a limited period. In Poland, Ukrainian citizens can stay free of charge in a collective accommodation centre for up to four months, after which they are required to contribute to housing and food costs.<sup>22</sup> In Bulgaria, the government provides free accommodation for up to three months, and beneficiaries in Slovakia have access to government-subsidized accommodation for the first 120 days after arrival.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, some countries such as Estonia and Czechia provide support to help refugees transition to long-term housing, mostly through financial assistance.<sup>24</sup>

Labour market integration prospects also vary across countries, including in terms of the opportunities available to beneficiaries and the support provided to help them find employment. In Poland, for example, the government has created a platform to facilitate the recruitment of Ukrainian job seekers.<sup>25</sup> In Lithuania, the government provides a one-off financial allowance of 620 euros to promote self-employment.<sup>26</sup> Some countries have also eased language and labour market restrictions in certain regulated professions in health care and education, as in Latvia where Ukrainian health professionals can work for up to one year under the supervision of a Latvian practitioner.<sup>27</sup>

*These differences in support are influencing integration outcomes.*

These differences in support are influencing integration outcomes. Countries that facilitate swift entry into the labour market appear to have higher participation rates in the short term

compared to countries that focus on attempting to match refugees from Ukraine, many of whom are highly educated, with jobs in line with their qualifications and skills, in the hope this will lead to more high-quality employment in the long term.<sup>28</sup> Other relevant factors include labour market dynamics (such as the types of jobs available, at what skill level and in which sectors), language barriers and the profiles of the refugee population in different host countries.<sup>29</sup> Overall, employment rates appear to be higher in Eastern and Central European countries compared to other countries. For instance, a 2023 IOM survey found that 76 per cent of respondents in Poland who were active in the labour market were employed, as were 71 per cent

22 This has been the case since the adoption of a new bill in Poland in March 2023. See European Commission, “Poland: New Regulation to Promote the Social Activation of People Displaced from Ukraine”, updated 30 November 2022.

23 TPD holders considered to be in a vulnerable situation can access subsidized accommodation for longer than 120 days in Slovakia. See UkraineSlovakia.sk, “Accommodation in Slovakia: Contribution for Accommodating Persons with Temporary Protection Status”, accessed 16 June 2024; European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), “Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine” (information sheet, 31 March 2023).

24 ECRE, “Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine”.

25 Praca w Polsce, “Find Work in Poland: Free Online Portal for Ukrainian Citizens”, accessed 30 May 2024.

26 Klára Fóti and Eurofound, *Social Impact of Migration: Addressing the Challenges of Receiving and Integrating Ukrainian Refugees* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024).

27 Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Kate Hooper, *Displaced Ukrainians in European Labour Markets: Leveraging Innovations for More Inclusive Integration* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2023).

28 Desiderio and Hooper, *Displaced Ukrainians in European Labour Markets*.

29 European Migration Network (EMN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Labour Market Integration of Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection from Ukraine* (Brussels and Paris: EMN and OECD Publishing, 2024).

in Estonia and 68 per cent in Czechia.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the employment rate in Germany was 27 per cent in the first quarter of 2024.<sup>31</sup>

## B. *Temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova*

Since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova has experienced unprecedented inflows of refugees, with more than 1 million entries into a country of just 2.6 million inhabitants. Even though many refugees have moved onward, there were still more than 120,000 people displaced from Ukraine in the country as of September 2024.<sup>32</sup>

The Moldovan government declared a state of emergency immediately after the February 2022 invasion, which allowed Ukrainian citizens as well as their non-Ukrainian spouses and TCNs who held refugee status in Ukraine to find protection and support in the country, including a right to work. The government subsequently created a national temporary protection status that was triggered in March 2023, one year after the activation of the TPD in the European Union, and later extended until March 2025.<sup>33</sup> The status grants the right to work as well as access to emergency and primary medical care, education for minors, and social welfare schemes and social protection, for the above-mentioned groups plus other non-Ukrainian dependants such as minor children and parents.<sup>34</sup>

In practice, many refugees from Ukraine have struggled to access employment in the Republic of Moldova due to a general lack of job opportunities and limited child care. Language barriers can also play a role, especially for refugees who do not speak Russian and for those seeking better-paid positions, which often require Romanian language skills. School enrolment has also been challenging. As of September 2023, it was estimated that only 8 per cent of refugee children from Ukraine were attending school.<sup>35</sup> Regarding housing, reception capacity in government centres is limited and only available to people who are particularly vulnerable or have special needs. Non-governmental organizations are the main actors helping refugees to secure short- and long-term accommodation, mainly through matching them with host families.<sup>36</sup>

The arrival of such large numbers of refugees has added another layer of complexity to the Republic of Moldova's already struggling economy, and the country has largely depended on international humanitarian aid to support refugees from Ukraine. Since 2022, the European Union has provided 66 million euros in humanitarian assistance to the country, through which cash assistance, warm clothes, medical care and psychosocial support were made available to vulnerable people residing in or transiting through the

30 IOM DTM, *Labour Market Integration of Ukrainian Refugees* (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2024).

31 Yuliya Kosyakova et al., *Arbeitsmarktintegration ukrainischer Geflüchteter: Eine internationale Perspektive* (Berlin: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, 2024).

32 UNHCR Operational Data Portal, "Ukraine Refugee Situation: Republic of Moldova", accessed 18 September 2024.

33 Devon Cone and Daphne Panayotatos, "Preparing for the Unpredictable: Ensuring the Protection and Inclusion of Refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova", Refugees International, 6 October 2022.

34 ECRE, "Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine".

35 UNHCR; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and UN Women, "Education of Refugee Children and Youth from Ukraine" (issue brief, June 2024).

36 UNHCR, *2023 Participatory Assessment Report: Republic of Moldova* (Chişinău: UNHCR Office in the Republic of Moldova, 2024).

Republic of Moldova.<sup>37</sup> Other donors, such as Japan and the United States, have also provided significant support.<sup>38</sup> In addition, staff members from the European Union Agency for Asylum were deployed to the country between May 2022 and April 2023 to assist Moldovan authorities with managing arrivals and to provide information about the EU+ Air Transfer programme, which facilitated the transfer of some refugees from Ukraine who were present in the Republic of Moldova to the European Union to reduce pressure on reception capacities.<sup>39</sup>

### C. *Uncertainty about the future*

Like most displacement situations around the world, the Ukrainian refugee crisis has been marked by uncertainty. Initially, European authorities grappled with how to welcome and support large numbers of refugees without knowing how many more would come, how many would move onward to other EU countries, and how long people would stay. As months and years have passed and hopes for a swift end to the war have dwindled, governments have shifted their focus to putting in place more structural support for refugees from Ukraine, including more comprehensive guidelines on ensuring that the accommodation provided by private hosts is adequate and enrolling children in local schools.<sup>40</sup> Much remains uncertain, however, about the longer-term prospects of these refugees in their European host countries.

#### Options available after March 2026

To date, no long-term strategy has emerged in the European Union regarding the status of refugees from Ukraine beyond the extension of temporary protection until March 2026. This extension is based on a broad interpretation of the text of the TPD as saying that protection can be extended for as long as the reasons for the directive's activation persist.<sup>41</sup> At a time when the leadership of EU institutions is being reshuffled, following the June 2024 European elections, this approach has conveniently postponed negotiations among Member States on a new joint position. Yet, it also stretches the limits of the wording of the directive, which suggests temporary protection should have a maximum duration of three years. This interpretation has invited some criticism from legal scholars.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the extensions of the TPD – which require Member State agreement year by year – create prolonged uncertainty about the future that can make it challenging for refugees and host communities to plan for the long term.

37 European Commission, "Humanitarian Aid Programme - Performance", accessed 26 September 2024.

38 US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Joint Statement on the U.S.-Moldova Strategic Dialogue" (media note, 23 March 2023); Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Part I: Japan's Efforts in Response to the Situation in Ukraine", in *Japan's International Cooperation: White Paper on Development Cooperation 2022* (Tokyo: Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

39 Cone and Panayotatos, "Preparing for the Unpredictable"; UNHCR, "EU+ Air Transfers", accessed 5 May 2024.

40 For example, the Government of Lithuania provides a financial incentive for residents to accommodate refugees from Ukraine, offering 150 euros for the first individual and 50 euros for each additional person, with the compensation available for up to three months. In the Republic of Moldova, assistance with finding suitable short-/long-term accommodation is primarily provided by non-governmental organizations, which help match refugees with suitable families to ensure appropriate and safe living conditions. See ECRE, "Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine".

41 European Commission, "Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision Extending Temporary Protection as Introduced by Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382" (COM [2024] 253 final, 11 June 2024).

42 Meltem Ineli-Ciger, "Legal Landmine: The Risky Proposition of Extending the Application of the EU Temporary Protection Directive beyond March 2025", *EU Law Analysis*, 31 May 2024.



As the war drags on, questions around the longer-term status of refugees from Ukraine will become even more pressing for the European Union and its Member States. One option will be to look for national solutions. For instance, refugees from Ukraine could apply for asylum in Member States.<sup>43</sup> However, national asylum systems are overstretched and would struggle to keep up if all 4.3 million

TPD beneficiaries were to lodge an asylum claim.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, temporary protection holders might be hesitant to apply for asylum since doing so would mean giving up (at least temporarily) certain rights, such as free movement between Member States and the right to work, while their claims are processed. An alternative would be for refugees to transition to protection statuses available under national law, such as the humanitarian statuses some Member States have for people who do not qualify for refugee status or subsidiary protection but who still have protection needs. This, however, would depend on the existence of such statuses in national legal frameworks and increase country-to-country differences in the types of protection and support available.

Finally, Member States could facilitate refugees' transition to other visa statuses if they meet the visa criteria, for example by waiving fees or introducing expedited processing. This could be an option, for instance, for those who are employed and who can meet the criteria for a labour-based visa. Yet, as with asylum applications, processing large volumes of visa applications would place significant pressure on Member State bureaucracies. In addition, not all refugees from Ukraine would be able to qualify for such visa options, and other solutions would need to be found for those excluded.

### **Policymaking in times of uncertainty**

This uncertainty about the future of the war in Ukraine and refugees' status in Europe has created challenges for temporary protection holders, host communities and European governments.<sup>45</sup> For refugees from Ukraine, the lack of clarity can be especially taxing and affect their mental health and psychosocial well-being.<sup>46</sup> It can also have an impact on their willingness to learn the host-country language, which is key for their integration, or to enrol their children in local schools.<sup>47</sup> Questions regarding their legal status and the duration of their stay can also be a barrier to accessing housing and employment, given the preference of some landlords for long-term rentals<sup>48</sup> and the reluctance of some employers to hire and invest in training refugees who may not remain in the country.

43 Katrien Luyten, "When EU Temporary Protection for Displaced People from Ukraine Ends: Possible Scenarios" (briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2024); ECRE, "Transitioning Out of the Temporary Protection Directive: ECRE's Analysis of the Main Options Available to Ensure a Smooth Transition Out of the TPD Regime for People Displaced from Ukraine" (policy paper no. 13, February 2024).

44 Eurostat, "4.3 Million People under Temporary Protection", updated 9 July 2024.

45 OECD, "Working towards Dual Intent Integration of Ukrainian Refugees" (policy brief, 3 November 2023); Red Cross EU Office, "Safe but Uncertain: Two Years after Displacement from Ukraine", updated 23 February 2024.

46 Red Cross EU Office, "Safe but Uncertain".

47 UNHCR, "Education on Hold" (education policy brief, September 2023).

48 For instance, an IOM study analysing the accommodation and financial situation of refugees from Ukraine found that some refugees in Czechia were turned away by property owners for various reasons, including a preference for long-term rentals. See IOM DTM, *Accommodation and Financial Situation of Ukrainian Refugees* (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2024).

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*As the war drags on, questions around the longer-term status of refugees from Ukraine will become even more pressing for the European Union and its Member States.*

*Some countries have established dual-intent integration policies, which aim to provide support in a way that could both aid refugees' integration into host communities and strengthen their capacity to potentially return to Ukraine at some point in the future.*

Meanwhile, some countries have established dual-intent integration policies, which aim to provide support in a way that could both aid refugees' integration into host communities and strengthen their capacity to potentially return to Ukraine at some point in the future.<sup>49</sup> For instance, Switzerland's State Secretariat for Migration recommends that cantons provide integration support as early as possible, even though the protection status held by refugees from Ukraine in

the country (called protection status S) is typically oriented toward return in the long term.<sup>50</sup> Dual-intent integration measures could include investing in training to help refugees develop skills that are important in the host country and that could also support the future reconstruction of Ukraine or pave the way for regular movement between countries.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, however, designing policies to support integration, return or the possibility of both calls for better understanding of the intentions of refugees to stay versus return to Ukraine and the extent to which they are already doing so.

### 3 Return Dynamics to Date

As the war continues, one central question for European and Ukrainian authorities is how many of the millions of people displaced from Ukraine may eventually return home. This section examines return dynamics to date, including how return (whether temporary or permanent) features among other mobility options and what the initial policy responses have been.

#### A. The scale and nature of returns

Data from border crossings and population surveys indicate that a significant number of refugees are already returning to Ukraine for varying lengths of time. As of April 2024, IOM estimated that about 1.2 million Ukrainians had returned from other countries.<sup>52</sup> In the survey on which that estimate is based, a majority of respondents (61%) had come back from other countries more than a year ago, suggesting

49 OECD, "Working towards Dual Intent Integration".

50 Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, *Fachbericht Programm S* (Bern: Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, 2023). In a few instances, Switzerland has also sought to connect Ukrainian refugees with companies that operate in both Switzerland and Ukraine to facilitate future transnational mobility. However, the implementation of such programmes has faced challenges. These include the limited capacity of many companies (especially smaller ones) to relocate staff between countries, the timing of job openings, differences in employer needs for specific skills and the skill profiles of refugees, and refugees' limited interest in relocating to areas in Ukraine where they may lack local connections.

51 Hanne Beirens, Lucía Salgado and Jasmijn Sloopjes, "Prolonged Ukrainian Displacement: An Uneasy Marriage of Reception, Integration, and Return Policies" (commentary, Migration Policy Institute, February 2023).

52 IOM estimated there were 4.7 million total returnees in Ukraine, including persons who had returned from abroad and those who had returned after a period of internal displacement, in both cases having gone back to their place of habitual residence after a minimum of two weeks of displacement since February 2022. Some refugees coming back to Ukraine from other countries cannot return to their place of habitual residence and therefore are internally displaced. As of April 2024, IOM counted 339,000 such returnees among the population of internally displaced persons in the country. See IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report: General Population Survey, Round 16* (Geneva: IOM, 2024).

that return movements might be slowing down.<sup>53</sup> The largest share had returned from Poland (37%), with smaller shares having come back from Germany (13%), Czechia (7%), Italy (6%), and Bulgaria and Romania (each 3%).

Upon return, refugees in the April 2024 survey most frequently went back to either Kyiv City (17%), Odeska oblast (14%) or Dnipropetrovska oblast (10%).<sup>54</sup> Most of those crossing back to Ukraine (64%) were doing so alone, and the vast majority (92%) were women. By far, the most commonly reported reason for return was a wish to be closer to friends and family (listed by 72% of respondents among their top three reasons for having returned), followed by considerations related to better income-earning opportunities at home (31%), the availability of housing (30%), an improved security situation (22%) and access to education for children (16%). Yet, refugees' reasons for returning have changed over time. Among those who had returned from abroad more than 1.5 years prior to data collection in April 2024, 29 per cent cited a favourable security situation among their top three reasons, compared to only 5 per cent among those who had returned in the six months prior to the survey. Among more recent returnees, the top factors were the wish to be closer to friends and family (73%), access to employment (28%) and housing (23%).

## B. *Permanent versus temporary return*

Return, however, is not always a linear movement from host countries to Ukraine. Indeed, many refugees do not move back to Ukraine permanently but instead visit for short periods of time. Among those surveyed by IOM in April to June 2024, 73 per cent intended to visit Ukraine for a short period of time, 11 per cent intended to stay in Ukraine and 16 per cent did not yet know if they wanted to stay or leave again.<sup>55</sup> It appears that the number of refugees coming back for short visits has been increasing over the duration of the war. In February 2024, a survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with refugees across Europe found that 50 per cent of respondents had visited Ukraine at least once since the beginning of their displacement, up from 39 per cent in May 2023.<sup>56</sup> Data also show that short-term visits are more frequent among refugees hosted in neighbouring countries.<sup>57</sup>

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*It appears that the number of refugees coming back for short visits has been increasing over the duration of the war.*

This pattern of temporary visits echoes a long-standing trend of circular mobility among Ukrainians. Even before the displacement crisis began in 2022, there was a strong culture of temporary migration between

53 These figures are based on additional information provided to the authors by IOM based on data collected for the General Population Survey, Round 16. For more on this survey, see IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report*.

54 The figures in this paragraph are based on additional information provided to the authors by IOM based on data collected for the General Population Survey, Round 16. For more on this survey, see IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report*.

55 IOM DTM, *Ukraine Response — Regional Analysis — Ukrainians Crossing Back to Ukraine (April - June 2024)* (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, 2024).

56 UNHCR, *Lives on Hold . . . Regional Intentions Report #5*.

57 Women are more likely to cross into Ukraine for a short visit than men (50% versus 35%). See IOM DTM, *Ukrainians and Third-Country Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine – July–September 2023 Regional Analysis* (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2023); UNHCR, "Ukraine Refugee Situation: Population Movements" (fact sheet no. 1, February 2024).

Ukraine and several European countries. In 2019, Ukrainian nationals were the largest non-EU labour force in the European Union. Of the 660,000 residence permits issued to Ukrainians for remunerated activities across Member States, most were for seasonal or circular work, with validity periods of 3–11 months.<sup>58</sup> In Poland especially, Ukrainians received 98 per cent of seasonal work permits between 2018 and 2021.<sup>59</sup>

Refugees' future return intentions will therefore likely also be influenced by these well-established mobility patterns. Many will hope to maintain links with their European host countries and communities, both privately and professionally. These current and likely future trends will be important to factor into policy responses, with return viewed not as an endpoint but as part of a broader story of mobility.

### C. *Initial policy responses*

So far, host-country government positions and policies towards temporary visits to Ukraine have varied. The TPD does not contain clear provisions related to beneficiaries visiting their country of origin, only stating that Member States may support "exploratory visits".<sup>60</sup> While the European Commission has stated that short-term visits to Ukraine should not lead to the revocation of temporary protection, the definition of "short-term visit" and the approaches taken by host countries differ. Some countries, such as Finland and Luxembourg, appear to not monitor short-term visits to Ukraine.<sup>61</sup> Other countries require temporary protection beneficiaries to notify authorities and allow them to return for short periods only, or else their status and associated rights might be revoked. For example, Belgium allows beneficiaries to return for three months without losing the rights granted under the TPD.<sup>62</sup> In Poland, refugees can return to Ukraine for one month, but visits longer than that can lead to the revocation of temporary protection.<sup>63</sup> And in Malta, the government has indicated that any visit to Ukraine, regardless of duration, would lead to the revocation of temporary protection, but people can reapply for it upon return to Malta.<sup>64</sup> These measures aim to help governments monitor the implementation of the TPD and manage the infrastructure and services needed to support refugees from Ukraine, but they may complicate or disincentivize short return visits. International organizations such as UNHCR have advocated for the ability of refugees to travel home for short periods of time, noting that visits may be necessary for refugees to see relatives or take care of property and that these visits may contribute to more durable return in the future.<sup>65</sup>

Most EU Member States, so far, do not have extensive or consistent policies regarding the long-term or permanent return and reintegration of refugees from Ukraine. This is mostly because Member States do not consider conditions in Ukraine to have improved enough for safe and dignified return to take place.<sup>66</sup> The TPD also states that Member States should ensure temporary protection beneficiaries make decisions about

58 Prague Process, "Ukrainian Labour Migration to the EU: State of Play, Challenges and Solutions", updated 15 March 2021.

59 Maciej Duszczyk and Paweł Kaczmarczyk, "The War in Ukraine and Migration to Poland: Outlook and Challenges", *Intereconomics* 57, no. 3 (2022).

60 Council of the European Union, "Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001".

61 ECRE, "Movement to and from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive" (policy note, January 2023).

62 Info-Ukraine.be, "Return to Ukraine", accessed 18 May 2024.

63 ECRE, "Movement to and from Ukraine".

64 ECRE, "Movement to and from Ukraine"; Malta Refugee Council, "Ukraine Info: Holders of Temporary Protection Temporarily Returning to Ukraine", updated 5 August 2022.

65 UNHCR, "UNHCR Position on Voluntary Return to Ukraine", updated June 2023. See also ECRE, "Movement to and from Ukraine".

66 IOM, "Return, Reintegration and Recovery: IOM's Position on Returns to Ukraine", updated October 2023.

return with full knowledge of the relevant facts, notably the security situation in their country of origin.<sup>67</sup> Yet, some Member States do offer assistance for refugees who wish to return to Ukraine. For instance, Belgium, Lithuania and the Netherlands started offering assisted returns as early as 2022. Since then, more countries have followed suit.<sup>68</sup>

*Experience from previous displacement crises in Europe points to the need to design reconstruction programmes in a way that reflects forms of mobility that have arisen during prolonged conflicts.*

Going forward, increasing emphasis will also likely be placed on linking return and reconstruction efforts, for instance through regional reconstruction initiatives that connect to return and reintegration programmes for formerly displaced people.<sup>69</sup> Experience from previous displacement crises in Europe points to the need to design reconstruction programmes in a way that reflects forms of mobility that have arisen during prolonged conflicts. For

example, refugees from the Western Balkans who sought safety in countries across Europe in the 1990s kept strong transnational ties after the end of the fighting, moving back and forth between their host and origin countries. Many young Bosnians also acquired higher education abroad.<sup>70</sup> Future Ukraine reconstruction and assistance programmes could be strengthened by taking into account the mobility patterns and skills that are being built among displaced Ukrainians.

## 4 Data Insights on Refugees' Return Intentions

Given the ongoing battles, continuing damage to critical infrastructure and prevalence of landmines in several regions in Ukraine, many unknown variables will shape the scale and nature of future returns to the country. However, examining the return intentions of refugees and their likely drivers can nonetheless provide useful insights about potential future movements and the factors behind them.<sup>71</sup> Based on more than 60,800 interviews conducted with Ukrainian refugees as part of the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region between April 2022 and December 2023, this section considers what insights can be drawn about the intentions of refugees to return to Ukraine in the short and long term. After exploring general patterns in return intentions, the section examines the role of individual and household factors, host-country characteristics and region-of-origin characteristics in shaping displaced Ukrainians' hopes for the future. In doing so, it considers variation in return intentions across the 10 study countries: Bulgaria,

67 European Commission, "Frequently Asked Questions on Going Home to Ukraine on a Voluntary Basis in the Context of the Temporary Protection Directive", accessed 13 July 2024.

68 According to an EMN query in September 2022, only three Member States (Belgium, the Netherlands and Lithuania) had measures in place to support Ukrainians wishing to return. More recently, other countries, such as Czechia, have started to put in place support measures as well. See EMN, "Ad-Hoc Query on 2022.40 Supporting Measures for Ukrainians Wishing to Go Back to Ukraine on a Voluntary Basis" (compilation of responses to a query, October 2022); Dutch Repatriation and Departure Service, "Assistance for Those Returning to Ukraine / Допомога з поверненням в Україну", updated 1 July 2022; Radio Prague International, "Czech Government Gives Helping Hand to Ukrainians Who Wish to Return Home", updated 6 April 2024.

69 Sophie Meiners, "Return and Reconstruction" (policy brief, German Council on Foreign Relations, 4 April 2024).

70 Marita Eastmond, "Transnational Returns and Reconstruction in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina", *International Migration* 44, no. 3 (August 2006): 141–66.

71 Philippe Wanner, "Can Migrants' Emigration Intentions Predict Their Actual Behaviors? Evidence from a Swiss Survey", *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22, no. 3 (2021): 1151–1179.

Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia. A final subsection separately looks at the return intentions of approximately 1,700 TCNs displaced from Ukraine. (See Box 3 and the Appendix for details on the methodology used in this analysis.)

### BOX 3

#### Measuring return intentions among displaced populations

Anticipating the future return of displaced populations can be challenging because of the unpredictability surrounding an ongoing war, difficulties collecting reliable and representative data among displaced people (both mobile populations abroad and internally displaced people in embattled territory), and the time gap between data collection and future return behaviour. One way to address these challenges is to collect survey data on *intentions* to return. Even though not all intentions translate into action, studies show an overall strong correlation between intentions and migration behaviour.

Studies also underline the importance of differentiating between intended timelines for return. As a result, surveys tend to distinguish between intentions to return in the short term, which involve concrete travel preparations, and intentions to return in the long term, which are more hypothetical. In the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, refugees from Ukraine were asked two separate questions:

- 1 Intentions to return in the short term: *“Do you intend to move to another country or location in [survey country] in the near future?”* For the purposes of this study, the relevant answer option is “yes, Ukraine”. Survey enumerators then asked these respondents to confirm whether they had concrete travel plans, such as bus tickets or arrangements with their current job to move within the next three months.
- 2 Intentions to return in the long term: *“Do you plan to return to Ukraine/your country of origin when it is safe to do so?”* In this case, the relevant answer option is “yes”.

While the analysis in this report examines intentions to return in both the short and long term, intentions to return in the short term are more immediately policy relevant and therefore receive more attention. In addition, intentions to return in the short term show more country-level variation (see Maps 1 and 2), which could be exploited in the multivariate analysis. Notably, while these survey questions can capture intentions that often lead to return, they do not capture the likely permanence of that return (though this is explored via follow-up questions about respondents’ return motives). Consequently, interpretation of these two survey questions should consider that return may not be permanent and could involve circular movement or re-emigration.

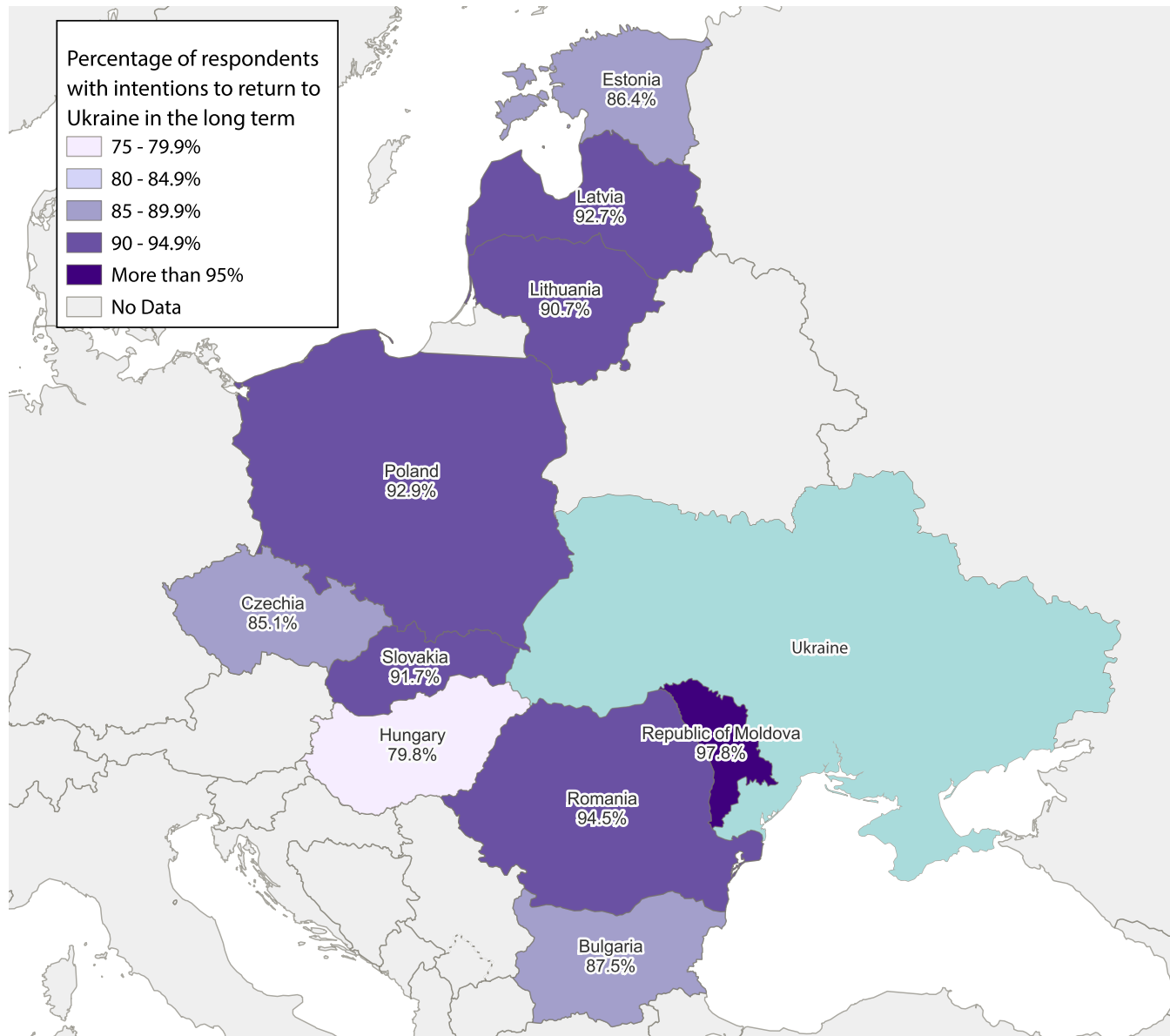
This section draws on both descriptive and multivariate analysis to explore respondents’ intentions to return in the short and long term. While descriptive analysis is used to summarize the data (e.g. via simple percentages describing the dataset), multivariate data analysis goes a step further by modelling the relationship between variables in regression analyses. It also allows the researchers to predict return intentions based on those regression analyses.

See the Appendix for additional information on the questions, categories and methodology used in this study.

Sources: Philippe Wanner, *“Can Migrants’ Emigration Intentions Predict Their Actual Behaviors? Evidence from a Swiss Survey”*, *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22, no. 3 (2021): 1151–1179; Jasper Tjaden, Daniel Auer and Frank Laczko, *“Linking Migration Intentions with Flows: Evidence and Potential Use”*, *International Migration* 57, no. 1 (2019): 36–57; IOM, *“Solutions for Displacement”*, accessed 20 June 2024.

MAP 1

**Ukrainian refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine in the long term, by host country, 2022–2023**



*Notes:* This map is for illustrative purpose only. The names and boundaries used do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe). References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

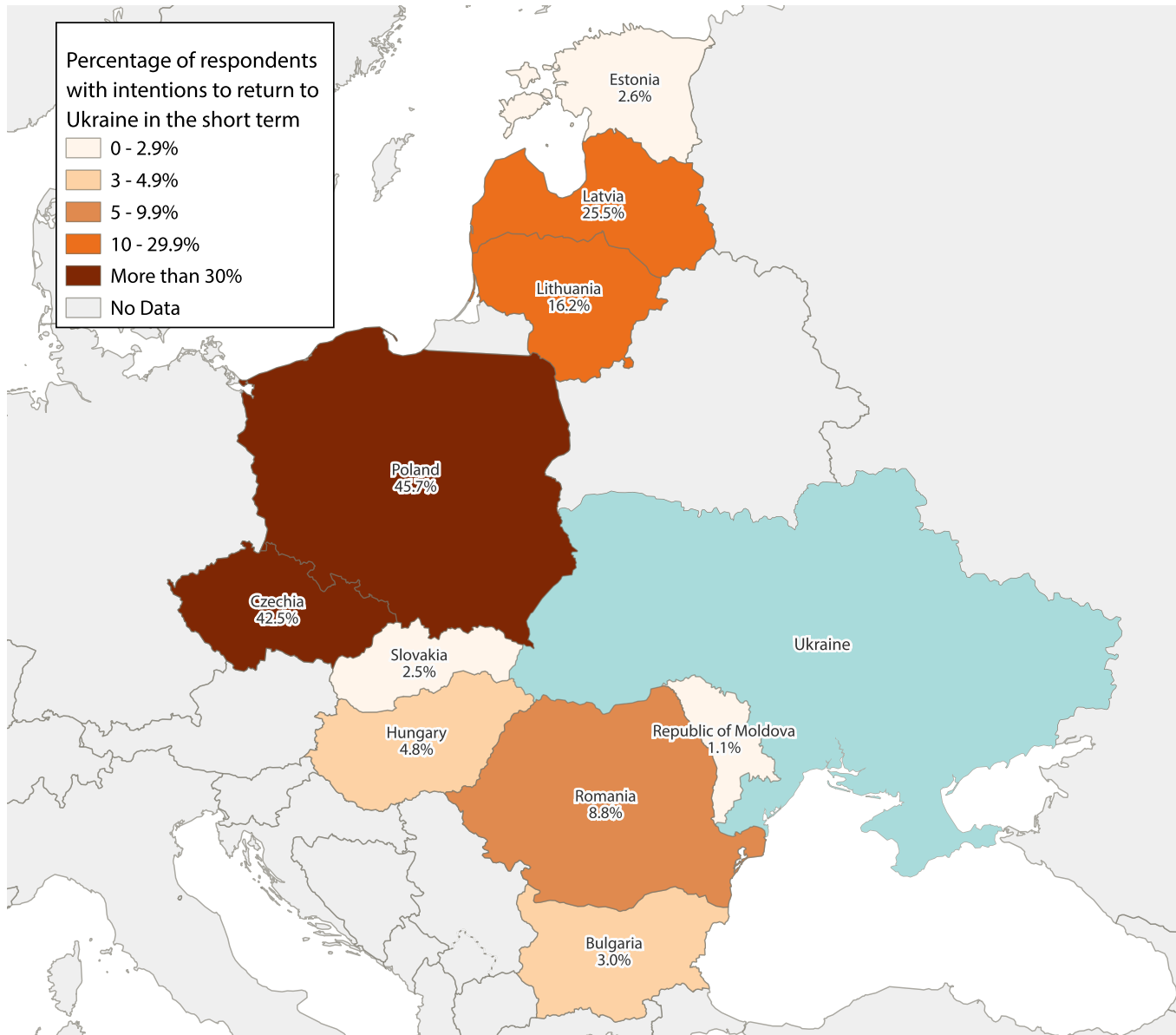
*Source:* Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

Across all 10 countries in the study, nearly all Ukrainians (91%) reported a desire to return home in the long term and when it is safe to do so. Intentions to return in the long term were highest in the Republic of Moldova (98%) and lowest – though still about 80 per cent or higher – in Hungary, Czechia and Estonia (see Map 1). In contrast, Ukrainians' intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term were much lower, at 15 per cent on average across the 10 countries. This pattern is commonly observed in displacement situations, where desires to return in the long term are often high whereas intentions to return in the short

term are low due to present conditions.<sup>72</sup> In the Ukrainian context, intentions to return in the short term also vary more significantly across countries. For instance, in Czechia and Poland, more than 40 per cent of respondents indicated that they had concrete plans to return to Ukraine in the short term compared to only 1 per cent of respondents in the Republic of Moldova (see Map 2).

**MAP 2**

**Ukrainian refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term, by host country, 2022–2023**



Notes: This map is for illustrative purpose only. The names and boundaries shown do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM or MPI Europe. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

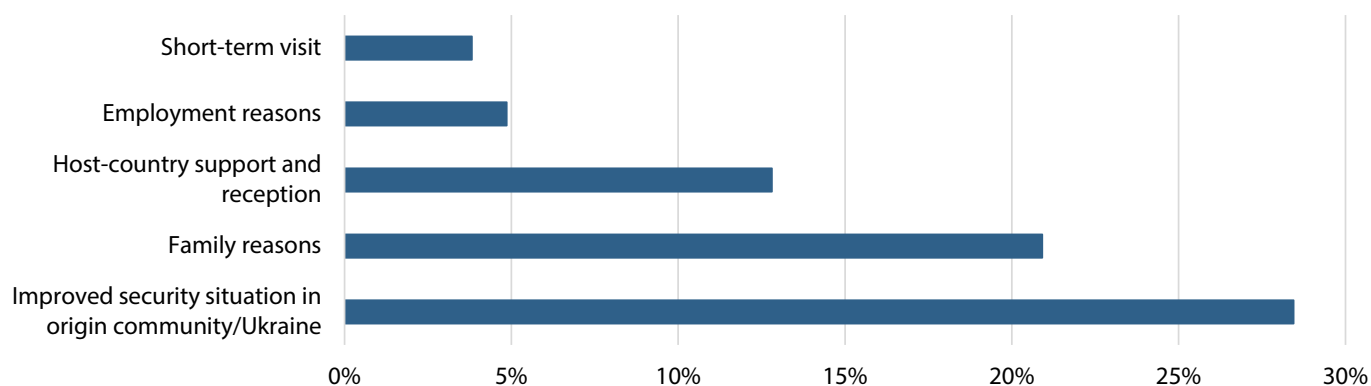
Source: Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

<sup>72</sup> For instance, a study of displaced Syrians in Lebanon found that while the majority wished to return at some point in the future, only a few planned to return in the short term. See Ala Alrababah et al., "The Dynamics of Refugee Return: Syrian Refugees and Their Migration Intentions", *British Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (2023): 1108–1131.



Ukrainian refugees had various reasons for planning to return to Ukraine in the near future, as can be seen in Figure 2. The single most decisive factor was an improved security situation in their Ukrainian region (oblast) of origin or Ukraine overall (28%), followed by family reasons (21%), such as reuniting with family members in Ukraine, taking family members to safety or assuming care responsibilities. In contrast, reception and support in the host country played a role for fewer refugees (13%). Some of these respondents noted that they did not have sufficient resources to cover the cost of living in their host country, did not manage to find shelter or accommodation, experienced discrimination or integration challenges, or had a humanitarian residence permit that was about to expire. Finally, 5 per cent of respondents said they intended to return for employment reasons (e.g. finding work in Ukraine or being unable to find work in their host country) and 4 per cent said they planned to travel to Ukraine for a short visit.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Motives for return among Ukrainian refugees who expressed an intention to return in the short term, 2022–2023**



*Note:* Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses.

*Source:* Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

The reasons Ukrainian refugees planned to return in the short term varied across host countries. For instance, an improved security situation in Ukraine was most frequently cited by refugees in Poland and Czechia (66% and 61% of respondents, respectively). Those indicating that an improved security situation at home was a factor in their intention to return tended to come from areas with a better security situation, namely from Vinnytska oblast, a region south-west of Kyiv (Ukrainians from this oblast represented 13% of respondents who selected this answer category in Poland), and Kyiv City (16% of respondents who selected this answer in Czechia). Family reasons were the most commonly cited factors among Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova and Slovakia (between 32% and 74%). Romania was the only country in which a lack of support and accommodation or integration challenges in the host country were reported as the most common reason for return.

That said, a lack of effective host-country support appeared to be more important for some groups than others. For instance, Ukrainian refugees who reported challenges related to host-country support and

reception were more likely to be accompanied by dependants and to have been displaced for longer than Ukrainian refugees who named other reasons for their planned return. This points to the heightened vulnerability and support needs of this group, in terms of a need for health and child care for example.

The three subsections that follow (4.A. – 4.C.) take a closer look at these diverse drivers of return intentions among displaced Ukrainians, drawing on both descriptive and multivariate analysis. The factors included in this quantitative analysis were selected based on a comprehensive literature review of 45 studies that empirically assessed intentions to return to Ukraine among refugees who fled the country following the February 2022 invasion, and 20 studies assessing return intentions in other conflict situations worldwide. In these studies, the origin-country security situation ranked among the most decisive factors shaping return intentions, along with related factors such as the possibility of accessing one's property upon return and of taking up income-generating activities.<sup>73</sup> Host-country reception and support were also shown to influence return intentions, although to varying degrees and not in all displacement contexts.<sup>74</sup> Finally, personal factors (including employment status, household composition and length of stay in the host country) were found to shape desires to return. For instance, a study of Ukrainian refugees in Germany found that unemployed refugees seeking education or training were 11 percentage points more likely to want to stay in Germany permanently than those unemployed and not seeking training opportunities.<sup>75</sup> In another study involving refugees from Ukraine in countries across Europe, those travelling with dependants (infants, children or older dependants) were more likely to plan to stay in their host country for a prolonged period than other refugees.<sup>76</sup> This section builds on these findings, drawing on IOM data and additional country-level indicators.

Table 1 summarizes the topline results of the analysis of displaced Ukrainians' return intentions across all 10 host countries. It shows whether each factor increased (+), decreased (–) or had no significant effect (no mark) on survey respondents' intention to return to Ukraine. More detailed results are then discussed below.

73 See, for instance, Louay Constant et al., *In Search of a Durable Solution: Examining the Factors Influencing Postconflict Refugee Returns* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021); Ilona Sologoub, "Return or Stay? What Factors Impact the Decisions of Ukrainian Refugees?", *Vox Ukraine*, 16 January 2024; Niels V. Harild, Asger Christensen and Roger William Zetter, "Sustainable Refugee Return: Triggers, Constraints, and Lessons on Addressing the Development Challenges of Forced Displacement" (working paper, World Bank Group, August 2015).

74 See, for instance, Judith Kohlenberger et al., "High Self-Selection of Ukrainian Refugees into Europe: Evidence from Kraków and Vienna", *PLOS ONE* 18, no. 12 (2023): 1–24; Josephine Andrews et al., "Feminized Forced Migration: Ukrainian War Refugees", *Women's Studies International Forum* 99 (2023); Ganna Dudinska, Helene Michou and Charmain Mohamed, *Ukrainian Homecoming: A Study of Refugee Returns from Poland* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022); IOM DTM, *Romania — Surveys with Refugees from Ukraine: Needs, Intentions, and Integration Challenges, January – March 2023* (Vienna and Bucharest: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia and IOM Country Office Romania, 2023); Herbert Brückner et al., "Ukrainian Refugees in Germany: Evidence from a Large Representative Survey", *Comparative Population Studies* 48 (2023): 395–424.

75 Herbert Brückner et al., "Geflüchtete aus der Ukraine: Knapp die Hälfte beabsichtigt längerfristig in Deutschland zu bleiben" (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung [DIW] Weekly Report 28, 2023).

76 UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine #1* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2022).

TABLE 1

**The positive, negative or no significant effect of personal and household, host-country, and region-of-origin characteristics on Ukrainian refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine in the short and long term, 2022–2023**

	Intentions to return in the short term	Intentions to return in the long term
<i>Coefficients</i>		
<b>Personal and household characteristics</b>		
Female	+	+
Age	+	+
Time since displacement	–	–
Employment in the host country	–	–
Number of dependants	–	
Tertiary education	+	+
<b>Host-country characteristics</b>		
Unemployment rate (2022)	+	
Poverty rate (2021)	–	+
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, expressed in terms of purchasing power parity (2022)	+	
Gini index (2021)		
Ukrainian diaspora (2021)		
Overall support index (2022)	+	–
<b>Characteristics of Ukrainian region of origin</b>		
Oblast gross regional product (GRP) (2021)		
Distance from oblast of origin to the host country	+	
War intensity, measured in number of battles and explosions in oblast of origin from February 2022 until the month of survey collection	–	–

*Notes:* Only statistically significant effects are reported (at the level: \*  $p < 0.05$ ). The analysis was conducted using Stata version 14, modelling the data via a multivariate regression analysis with robust standard errors. See the Appendix for additional details.

*Source:* Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023, and additional data sources described in Appendix Tables A–4 and A–5.

## A. *Personal and household factors*

This section utilizes both descriptive statistics and multivariate regression analysis, which takes into account differences in demographic composition and survey country, in order to produce more generalizable findings about the impact of personal and household characteristics on Ukrainian refugees' return intentions.

## Employment

Multivariate analysis of personal and household drivers showed employment to be among the most important factors shaping intentions to return to Ukraine in the short and long term. Across countries in this study, Ukrainian refugees who were formally employed in their host country were on average 12 percentage points less likely to have plans to return to Ukraine in the near future than those who were not employed in their host country.

Yet, the effect of employment varied across host countries, as did the share of survey respondents who were employed in these countries.<sup>77</sup> For instance, having host-country employment strongly reduced the likelihood of displaced Ukrainians intending to return to Ukraine in the short term in Czechia and Poland, but it had no effect in the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia and Bulgaria. In these latter three countries, intentions to return to Ukraine in the near future were overall among the lowest (see Map 2), and employment did not appear to lower them further. Across all countries, host-country employment had a smaller effect on Ukrainians' desires to return to Ukraine in the long term, but this effect was more consistent from country to country.

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*Ukrainian refugees who were formally employed in their host country were on average 12 percentage points less likely to have plans to return to Ukraine in the near future than those who were not employed in their host country.*

Figure 3 shows the predicted share of Ukrainian refugees with intentions to return in the short term, based on their employment status in the host country and the time since their initial displacement. While refugees both with and without host-country employment were less likely to express an intention to return the longer they were displaced, those who were employed showed consistently lower return intentions, even shortly after their displacement. For instance, after 100 days of displacement (almost 3.5 months), about 21 per cent of refugees who are not employed in the host country are predicted to have concrete return plans, compared to 7 per cent of those who are employed.

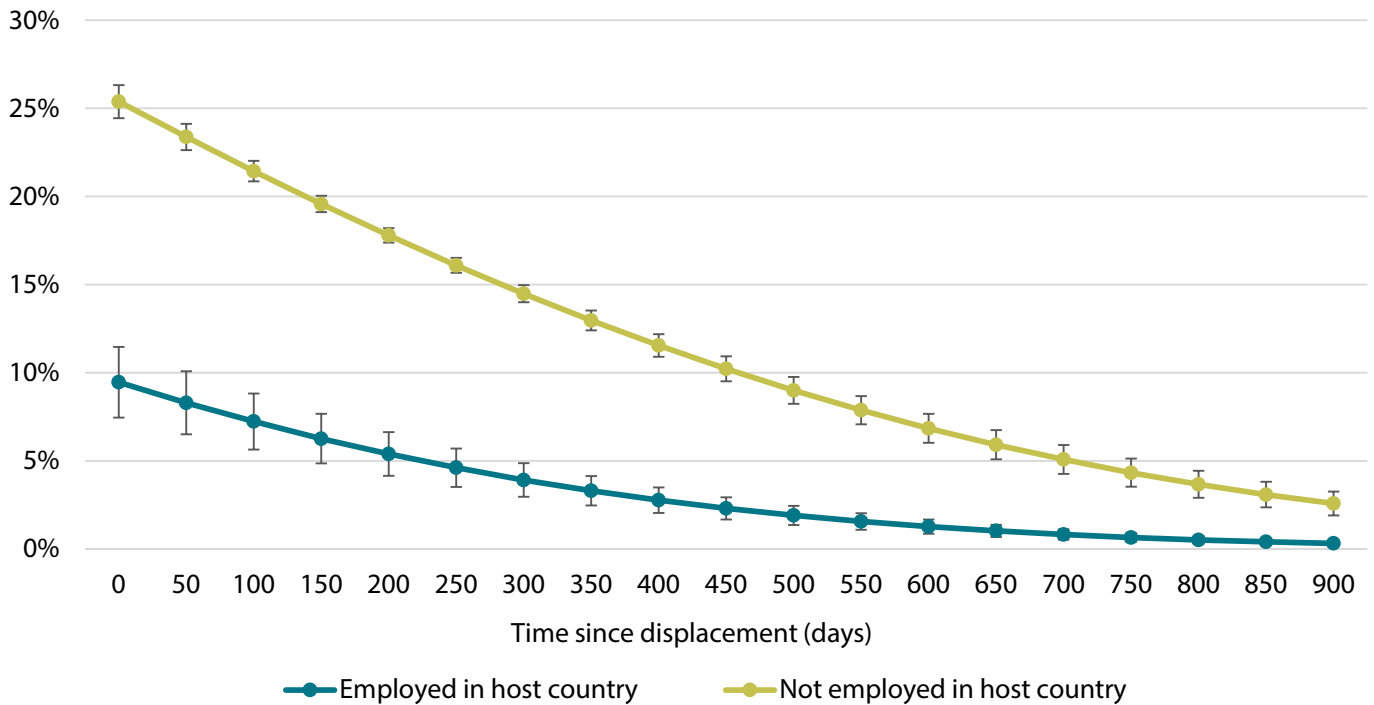
Displaced Ukrainians working remotely for Ukraine-based companies were more likely to say they wanted to return to Ukraine in the short term than those employed in the host country. A small group of 548 people (or 14% of respondents in the sub-sample of Ukrainian refugees who were asked about the nature of their employment) reported that they remained officially employed in Ukraine and worked remotely for Ukraine-based companies. For instance, in the Republic of Moldova, 36 per cent of people who were employed and were asked this question said they worked remotely – the largest share across host countries. In comparison to Ukrainian refugees formally employed in their host country, 92 per cent of whom planned to stay in that country for the near future, a smaller 62 per cent of those working remotely for Ukrainian companies planned to do so. Conversely, refugees working remotely were more likely to intend to return to Ukraine in the short term (11%) than those officially employed in their host country (2%).

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<sup>77</sup> In the IOM survey, the shares of respondents who were employed were: Czechia (56%), Estonia (54%), Slovakia (41%), Lithuania (37%), Poland (37%), Hungary (34%), Latvia (32%), Romania (28%), Bulgaria (24%) and Republic of Moldova (16%).

FIGURE 3

### Predicted share of Ukrainian refugees who intend to return to Ukraine in the short term, by employment status and time since displacement, 2022–2023



Source: Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

Finally, future employment prospects might also play a role in shaping return intentions. Results from the latest General Population Survey in Ukraine, conducted in March–April 2024, showed that recent returnees had notably higher unemployment rates compared to those who returned from abroad longer ago: 5% of refugees who returned more than 1.5 years ago were unemployed compared to 13% of those who returned within the six months prior to the survey.<sup>78</sup> This pattern was consistent across Ukraine's regions. Refugees who have found work in host country may thus consider return, and the prospect of struggling to find work in Ukraine, too economically risky.

### Time since displacement

Desires to return to Ukraine appear to shrink the longer refugees spend in displacement: 11 per cent of survey respondents with above-average displacement times had plans to return to Ukraine in the near future, compared to 25 per cent of those with below-average displacement times. People displaced for longer were also less likely to indicate a desire to return in the long term, though the difference was not as large (89% compared to 94%). Additionally, Ukrainian refugees who had spent more than the average amount of time in their host country were more likely to be fluent in the country's language and to be officially employed there, factors that likely contributed to their lower return intentions.

<sup>78</sup> This is based on additional information provided to the authors by IOM based on data collected for the General Population Survey, Round 16. For more on this survey, see IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report*.

Average displacement times vary across host countries, with some countries experiencing mostly transit migration and others registering longer-term stays. On average, respondents in the IOM survey had spent about eight months (249 days) in their host country since their displacement from Ukraine. Latvia and the Republic of Moldova stand out as countries of transit, with refugees spending an average of 59 and 133 days, respectively, in these countries and being more likely to say they want to move onward to another country (particularly in Latvia, where 35% expressed this desire). In contrast, respondents in Bulgaria and Romania had spent on average more than 13 months in these countries since their displacement. In both Latvia and the Republic of Moldova, unlike other host countries, longer displacement times were linked to slightly *increased* intentions to return in the short term, which might be related to their status as transit countries; for example, while refugees spend relatively little time in these countries on average, those who remain for longer may do so because their options for onward movement are limited and, as a result, they may give more thought to returning to Ukraine.

### Children and older dependants

Ukrainian refugees travelling with dependants, whether children or older adults, were less likely to say they intended to return to Ukraine in the short term, even when considering differences in other demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education and employment. Across the 10 countries surveyed, about half of survey respondents reported having children or taking care of children under the age of 18. Only in Latvia was the share of respondents *without* children considerably larger, at 69 per cent. Among refugee

*Ukrainian refugees travelling with dependants, whether children or older adults, were less likely to say they intended to return to Ukraine in the short term.*

families with children, those in Hungary reported taking care of the most children (1.9 children per family on average), whereas those in Czechia had the fewest (1.5 children). Far fewer respondents were living in families with older dependants, only 17 per cent overall.<sup>79</sup> The share was by far the highest in Bulgaria (58%) and lowest in the Republic of Moldova (5%).

Families with more children are less likely to want to return to Ukraine in the short term, but the number of children in a family does not appear to affect intentions to return in the long term. The statistical model developed from this dataset predicts that 18 per cent of families with one child would indicate plans to return in the short term, compared to 13 per cent of families with two children and 9 per cent of families with three children. The number of older dependants did not appear to change a family's return intentions much, with the model predicting that 16 per cent of both refugees with one and with two older dependants would indicate an intention to return to Ukraine in the short term. The impact of having dependants is consistent across countries. In contrast to intentions to return in the short term, having children or older dependants did not appear to influence desires to return in the long term.

While women are more often caretakers of children – and the presence of children in a family is linked to lower return intentions – women overall had higher return intentions than men, both in the short and in the long term. One likely explanation, at least for differing intentions to return in the short term, is that current

<sup>79</sup> In the IOM survey, "older people" were defined as people age 60 or older in 2022 but age 65 or older in 2023.

martial law in Ukraine obliges men to serve in the army, likely limiting return planning among refugee men. In addition, women are more likely to travel without their partners, given the military conscription rules requiring some men to stay in Ukraine. As a result, women may be more inclined to indicate a desire to return to Ukraine in the long term, to reunite with their partners.

Finally, data collected via the General Population Survey in Ukraine in March–April 2024 suggest that returns involving children may have become less common as the war has stretched on. While 64 per cent of refugees who returned more than 18 months prior to the survey lived in households with children, only 41 per cent of refugees who returned in the six months before the survey did so.<sup>80</sup>

## Age groups

The age of displaced Ukrainians varies across countries, with survey respondents in Bulgaria oldest on average (49 years) and those in Estonia youngest (39 years). A refugee's age has a small effect on intentions to return, with a tendency for older individuals to indicate stronger desires to return than younger ones (see Figure 4). This positive impact of age could be seen on intentions to return in both the short term and the long term. For instance, 80 per cent of respondents who were 18–25 years old indicated a desire to return in the long term versus 95 per cent of those over age 55. Intentions to return in the short term were slightly higher among the oldest and youngest age groups than those in the middle, but the differences were minimal. When controlling for differences in personal and household characteristics (such as gender, time since displacement and number of children), the effect becomes more pronounced: the model predicts that 13 per cent of 20-year-old refugees plan to return in the short term versus 19 per cent of 50-year-old refugees.

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*A refugee's age has a small effect on intentions to return, with a tendency for older individuals to indicate stronger desires to return than younger ones.*

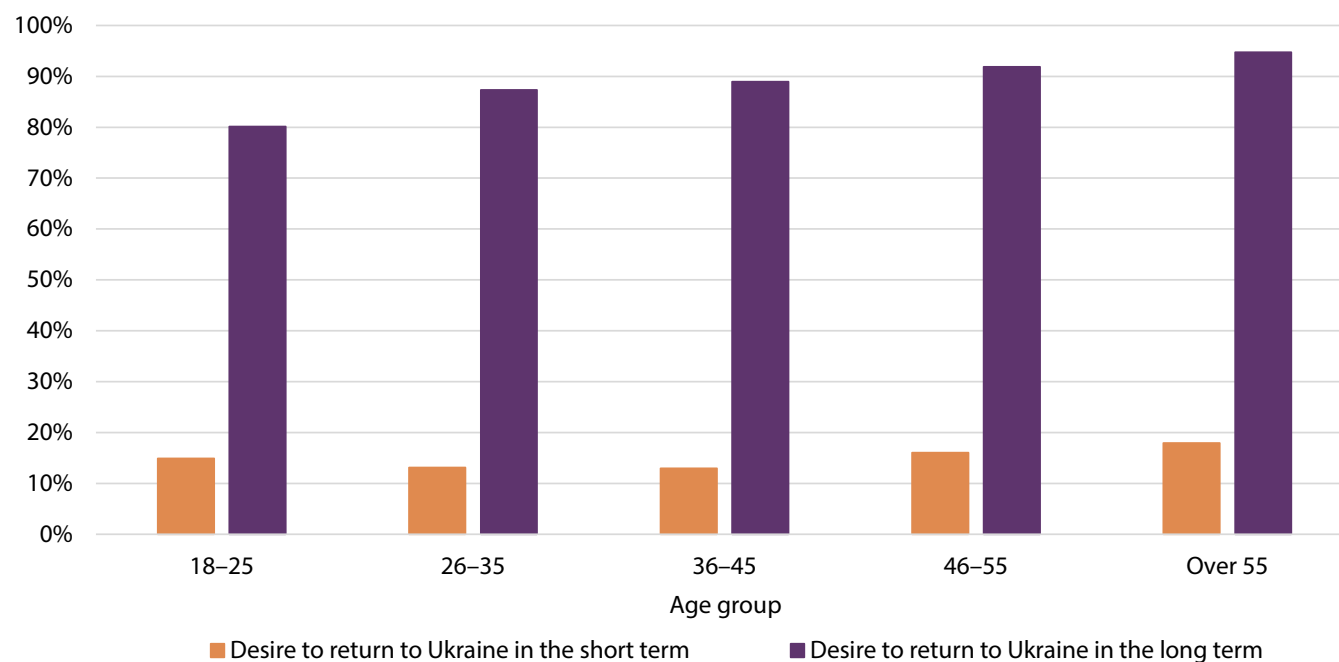
These results align broadly with the findings of previous studies, even if the effects are somewhat smaller in data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region. For instance, a UNHCR study based on data collected in six countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia) found that 16 per cent of refugees from Ukraine who were age 60 or over were planning on returning, compared to 11 per cent of those ages 18–34 and 35–59.<sup>81</sup> Another study, conducted among refugees from Ukraine living in Germany, similarly found that younger refugees tend to be more interested in staying in Germany in the long term than returning to Ukraine.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> This is based on additional information provided to the authors by IOM based on data collected for the General Population Survey, Round 16. For more on this survey, see IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report*.

<sup>81</sup> UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine #1*.

<sup>82</sup> Tetyana Panchenko, "Prospects for Integration of Ukrainian Refugees into the German Labor Market: Results of the IFO Online Survey", *CESifo Forum* 23, no. 4 (July 2022): 67–75.

FIGURE 4

**Predicted share of Ukrainian refugees who intend to return to Ukraine in the short or long term, by age group, 2022–2023**

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

## Education

Ukrainian refugees have high levels of education overall. More than half (52%) of survey respondents across the 10 study countries indicated they had completed tertiary education, and another 30 per cent had completed upper secondary education. The share of respondents who had tertiary education was highest in Bulgaria (61%) and lowest in Latvia (42%).

The impact of education on return intentions is twofold: On the one hand, this analysis found only a very small positive effect of tertiary education on intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term. However, highly educated refugees appear somewhat more likely to indicate a desire to return in the long term, when it is safe to do so. The direction of these effects is largely consistent across countries, but the relationship does not hold in some. For instance, tertiary education appears to play a role in intentions to return in the long term for Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, but not in the other study countries.



## B. *Host-country factors*

To explore the impact of structural and policy conditions in host countries on Ukrainian refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine, this section uses secondary data in combination with the individual-level data from the IOM survey. In particular, it takes into consideration host countries' gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, levels of unemployment and income inequality. It also uses a policy index created for this study, based on information from international organizations and government sources, to capture the levels of support host countries provide in five policy areas: health care, the labour market, social welfare, housing and education. (See the Appendix for more details about the secondary data used and the construction of the policy index.)

### Economic conditions

Across the 10 countries in this analysis, Ukrainian refugees who resided in host countries with a higher GDP and less poverty (measured as the ratio of the population that falls below the poverty line, based on World Bank data) were slightly more likely to indicate intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term. For instance, according to the statistical model developed, one would expect only 2 per cent of respondents to have concrete plans to return to Ukraine in a country with a high poverty rate of 30 per cent. In contrast, 27 per cent of refugees would be expected to have such return plans in a country with a low poverty rate of 10

*Ukrainian refugees who resided in host countries with a higher GDP and less poverty... were slightly more likely to indicate intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term.*

per cent. The poverty rate in the countries included in this analysis ranged from 10 per cent in Czechia to 25 per cent in the Republic of Moldova in 2021.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, unemployment levels appeared to be linked with higher intentions to return in the short term. Income inequality (measured via the Gini index) had no impact. Intentions to return in the long term were unaffected by a host country's GDP, unemployment level or income inequality.

These findings may seem surprising, given the widely held assumption that it is people experiencing the most acute poverty who are most likely to move and seek opportunities elsewhere. This dataset suggests a different pattern among Ukrainian refugees, one in which living in a place that is more economically prosperous increases mobility intentions – possibly because refugees have the capacity and resources to plan a return trip. This would be in line with the growing body of empirical research indicating that economic development can act as a facilitator of international migration, given that any type of movement requires resources, networks and planning capacity, which tend to be more readily available in societies

<sup>83</sup> For a 1-point increase in the poverty rate, the model predicts a 0.11 increase in the likelihood of wanting to return to Ukraine in the near future and a 0.03 increase of wanting to return in the long term when it is safe to do so.

with a better economy.<sup>84</sup> Research specifically on refugee return mobility has also found that poverty can act as a constraint, since returning requires financial resources and anticipatory planning.<sup>85</sup>

However, while the present study's findings point to this type of dynamic, they are not conclusive. One crucial piece of missing information in this analysis is the nature of refugees' intended return. Understanding whether refugees intend to make repeated, temporary return movements (i.e. circular migration) or to move permanently could provide more insight into this relationship. For example, circular movements may require greater financial means, and refugees in host countries with better economic conditions may have the resources to engage in this type of return, compared to refugees in poorer host countries, who – if they plan to return to Ukraine – may intend for their move to be permanent.

### Temporary protection and other support measures

The policy index developed for this study showed considerable variation in the support provided to refugees, both across host countries and types of assistance. For instance, the countries in this analysis tend to offer relatively robust support in terms of health care, but more limited social welfare assistance. The Republic of Moldova and Slovakia provide the least comprehensive support across the five dimensions examined (health care, the labour market, social welfare, housing and education), while Latvia offers the most extensive assistance. This reflects the fact that the overall support index is strongly correlated with a country's GDP, thus capturing to some extent the economic capacity of different countries to provide support.<sup>86</sup>

The analysis showed that Ukrainian refugees in countries that provide more inclusive support overall are more likely to have plans to return to Ukraine in the near future, but less likely to intend to return in the long term.<sup>87</sup> When looking at the different types of support, the picture is more nuanced. Refugees in countries that provide more inclusive educational, health and social support were more likely to intend to return to Ukraine in the short term than refugees in countries where these types of support were more limited. However, refugees in countries with more extensive labour market integration and employment support tended to want to stay in their host countries. In addition, Ukrainian refugees in countries that provide more labour market, social welfare and educational supports were less likely to express a desire to return to Ukraine in the long term than those in countries with more comprehensive health care. Accommodation support did not appear to have an effect on intentions to return, whether in the short or long term. Overall, the picture emerging from these analyses is one of support enabling refugees to engage in return planning in the short term, but somewhat driving down intentions to return in the long term.

84 This body of research examining the link between emigration and development across countries shows an inverse U-curve. Emigration rates are low in the poorest countries, then rise as development increases, before declining again when income per capita reaches about USD 6,000. The link between growing incomes and emigration holds both on a country level and a personal level. For instance, in low-income countries, people actively preparing to emigrate have incomes that are 30 per cent higher than the population average. See Michael Clemens, "The Emigration Life Cycle: How Development Shapes Emigration from Poor Countries" (working paper, Center for Global Development, 18 August 2020); Thu Hien Dao, Frédéric Docquier, Chris Parsons and Giovanni Peri, "Migration and Development: Dissecting the Anatomy of the Mobility Transition", *Journal of Development Economics* 132, Issue C (2018): 88–101.

85 Harild, Christensen and Zetter, "Sustainable Refugee Return".

86 The correlation between the overall support index and gross domestic product (GDP) is 0.77.

87 This analysis is based on the aggregate support index, which averages the sub-indices into one score.

These findings are in line with those of some previous assessments, which have shown that reception and integration support can permit Ukrainians to freely make a decision regarding their mobility.<sup>88</sup> Like living in a society with better economic conditions, supportive policies and programmes can allow refugees to build or maintain the social networks, skills and financial means to engage in return planning. As noted above, the results of this analysis do not allow direct conclusions to be drawn about the nature of those potential returns, but previous research finds that return in protracted refugee situations is frequently staggered or cyclical.<sup>89</sup> Given that refugees' intentions to return in the long term are lower in host countries providing more support, it is likely that at least some of these planned returns are temporary visits rather than more permanent returns to Ukraine.

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*Like living in a society with better economic conditions, supportive policies and programmes can allow refugees to build or maintain the social networks, skills and financial means to engage in return planning.*

## Ukrainian diaspora

The presence of a large diaspora in a host country can help support new arrivals and facilitate their reception and integration into the labour market and broader communities. Indeed, a growing body of research shows that social networks can improve migrants' labour market integration, which in turn might reduce return intentions.<sup>90</sup> Yet, in this analysis, the presence of a larger Ukrainian diaspora (measured via residence permits granted to Ukrainian nationals per 1,000 host-country inhabitants in 2021) did not appear to have an impact on refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine in the short or long term.<sup>91</sup> The analysis was not, however, able to capture the degree to which individual refugees had and were able to tap into diaspora network connections for the purpose of supporting their integration, which previous research shows is essential for realizing the potential impact of diaspora groups.<sup>92</sup> (Note: This part of the analysis excluded the Republic of Moldova since no data comparable to EU residence permit data were available.<sup>93</sup>)

## C. Origin-country factors

The security situation in an origin country is frequently shown to be among the most decisive factors shaping refugee returns. Even if the impact of this factor shrinks over time, as refugees settle into life in

88 A 2023 report by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration reached a similar conclusion. See Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, *Fachbericht Programm S*.

89 Brigitte Rohwerder, *Refugee Return in Protracted Refugee Situations* (N.p.: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2015).

90 See, for instance, Linna Martén, Jens Hainmueller and Dominik Hangartner, "Ethnic Networks Can Foster the Economic Integration of Refugees", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 33 (July 2019); Klarita Gërxhani and Yuliya Kosyakova, "The Effect of Co-Ethnic Social Capital on Immigrants' Labor Market Integration: A Natural Experiment", *Comparative Migration Studies* 10, no. 15 (2022).

91 Czechia had the largest Ukrainian diaspora of any EU country before the February 2022 invasion, with about 18 Ukrainians holding a residence permit per 1,000 inhabitants. In contrast, the Ukrainian diaspora in Romania was small, at about 0.1 Ukrainians per 1,000 inhabitants. Authors' analysis based on data from Eurostat, "All Valid Permits by Reason, Length of Validity and Citizenship on 31 December of Each Year [migr\_resvalid]", accessed 20 September 2024; Eurostat, "Population on 1 January by Age Group, Sex and Citizenship [migr\_pop1ctz]", accessed 20 September 2024.

92 See, for instance, Gërxhani and Kosyakova, "The Effect of Co-Ethnic Social Capital".

93 For the other countries, comparable data are from Eurostat, "Ukrainian Citizens in the EU".

another country or region, it remains a necessary condition for return, along with related factors such as the ability to recover one's property and housing.<sup>94</sup> This section examines how the security situation in Ukraine's oblasts plays into the return intentions of Ukrainian refugees. It also examines the impacts of geographic proximity and regional economic prosperity, as both can be indicators of the ease of return and oblasts' habitability amid the ongoing war.

## Intensity of the war

In this analysis, war intensity is measured using data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project,<sup>95</sup> which made it possible to count the total number of recorded battles and explosions in a respondent's oblast of origin from February 2022 until the month when they completed the survey. The intensity of the war varies widely between locations and across time. For instance, multiple regions recorded only one explosion and/or battle within a given month (Kyiv City in April 2023, for example), while others recorded more than 1,000 explosions and/or battles in a given month (for example, Donetska oblast in eastern Ukraine recorded more than 1,200 each month from May 2022 through December 2023).

*War intensity had a clear negative impact on return intentions in this analysis.*

War intensity had a clear negative impact on return intentions in this analysis. For instance, about 20 per cent of Ukrainian refugees would be predicted to report an intention to return in the short term if their home region had experienced no violent encounters

since February 2022 versus 7 per cent for a high-intensity region with more than 35,000 incidents (such as Donetska oblast). For desires to return in the long term, the effect is similar. About 92 per cent of Ukrainian refugees from a region without battles would be expected to report a desire to return home when it is safe to do so, versus 73 per cent of refugees from a highly embattled region.

As with any variable, there are limitations to what this can measure. For instance, while the number of battles is likely to be correlated with the level of destruction of housing and infrastructure in a region, it does not directly measure it. In addition, a measure of past and current war intensity does not account for future war risks, such as the presence of unexploded landmines, which could lead to future destruction and loss of life, a prospect that may deter some refugees from returning.<sup>96</sup> Finally, refugees are aware of the volatility of the war; even regions that have been relatively less affected by battles and explosions could become future targets, which may mean even those regions are not viewed as safe for return by their former inhabitants.

## Oblast wealth

The wealth of refugees' regions of origin did not appear to have an effect on either their intentions to return in the near future or their desires to return in the long term. The lack of an effect might be connected to the ongoing war and the limited possibilities for reconstruction, especially in the most embattled regions (including Odeska oblast, from which 26% of survey respondents came).

94 Constant et al., *In Search of a Durable Solution*; Sologoub, "Return or Stay?"

95 Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "Data & Tools", accessed 30 May 2024.

96 Krzysztof Nieczydor, "Ukraine: The World's Biggest Minefield" (commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 22 November 2023).

## Distance from oblast of origin

The distance between displaced individuals' oblast of origin and their host country did not appear to have an effect on their desire to return in the long term, but it did show a positive effect on intent to return in the short term. In other words, Ukrainians who were farther away from their oblast of origin were more likely to have concrete plans to return to Ukraine in the short term than those close by. This is related to the fact that intentions to return in the short term were highest in Poland and Czechia (see Map 2), where many respondents had come from Kyiv City or from Odeska oblast, farther-away regions. Moreover, since all of the countries included in this study are in Central and Eastern Europe, and thus relatively close to Ukraine, it is impossible to say whether this finding would hold for other, more-distant EU host countries.

## D. Return intentions among displaced third-country nationals

Alongside Ukrainian nationals, the war in Ukraine has also displaced citizens of other countries who resided in Ukraine for work, family, study or humanitarian reasons. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that there were almost 5 million international migrants in Ukraine in 2020.<sup>97</sup> Separately, the Ukrainian government reported that 76,000 international students were attending Ukrainian universities before the war.<sup>98</sup>

Compared to Ukrainian refugees, who have benefitted from temporary protection in EU Member States and countries such as the Republic of Moldova, the displacement of many TCNs has been fraught with additional challenges. Reports have highlighted repeated instances of discrimination, both en route and at the European Union's external borders.<sup>99</sup> In addition, while all Member States are to treat certain groups of TCNs as eligible for protection under the TPD (e.g. stateless persons and TCNs with international protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2024 and their family members, and TCNs who held a valid residence permit in Ukraine and are unable to safely return to their home country<sup>100</sup>), national governments have considerable discretion to decide whether to grant protection to others, such as TCNs who held a temporary work or study permit or who had a pending asylum application in Ukraine. While a few Member States – such as Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain – chose to grant protection to a broader set of people, some have since started to lift those protections, after which TCNs must apply for another legal status or return to their country of origin.<sup>101</sup> Thus, even as Ukrainian temporary protection holders face uncertainty about their status after March 2026, that uncertainty is even greater and more pressing for many displaced TCNs.

97 United Nations Population Division, "International Migrant Stock 2020", accessed 20 August 2024.

98 Bram Frouws, "When War Hit Ukraine. Reflections on What It Might Mean for Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policies in Europe", Mixed Migration Centre, 9 March 2022; Soraya Ali, "Ukraine: Why So Many African and Indian Students Were in the Country", BBC News, 4 March 2022.

99 Lindsey N. Kingston and Igbo Ekakitie, "How Black African Students Experienced Forced Displacement from Ukraine", *Forced Migration Review*, September 2023.

100 European Commission, "Communication from the Commission on Operational Guidelines".

101 Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Residency Non-Ukrainians with Temporary Ukrainian Residence Permit", updated 7 June 2024; Stephanie Busari and Nimi Princewill, "Foreign Students Fled Ukraine as War Broke Out. Some Remain in Limbo, While Others Fear Deportation", CNN, 10 March 2023; Fragomen, "Worldwide/Ukraine: Temporary Protection Status - Country-Specific Updates", updated 10 September 2024.

The return intentions of TCNs displaced from Ukraine are therefore shaped by a different set of considerations than those of Ukrainian refugees. While the data analysis presented in earlier parts of Section 4 focused solely on Ukrainian nationals, a smaller number of TCNs (about 1,700 persons) did provide insights on their return intentions as part

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*The return intentions of TCNs displaced from Ukraine are... shaped by a different set of considerations than those of Ukrainian refugees.*

of the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region. Within that group, the largest numbers were from India or Azerbaijan (each 13% of surveyed TCNs), followed by the Russian Federation (12%), and most were residing in Hungary (54%) and the Republic of Moldova (31%). Both host countries do not automatically grant temporary protection to TCNs who held a temporary residence permit in Ukraine. For instance, in Hungary, displaced TCNs are initially provided with a short transitional stay permit valid for a few weeks, after which they must submit an application for a new residency status (e.g. based on work, study, humanitarian protection or medical treatment). Depending on the status, applicants may need to provide proof of accommodation, sufficient means of subsistence and health insurance – all of which can be extremely challenging to secure for new arrivals – or else face deportation.<sup>102</sup>

Data from the IOM survey indicate that only a small minority of displaced TCNs had plans to return to Ukraine in the near term (3%). Instead, 27 per cent said they planned to stay in their host countries, and about 70 per cent had made plans to move onward to another country – either their origin country or another destination. Family ties and educational reasons were the top motivating factors for TCNs' reported plans (cited by 50% and 18% of respondents, respectively), with the latter reflecting the fact that 13 per cent of displaced TCNs were university students and may aim to continue their education. Even though many Ukrainian universities have made efforts to accommodate displaced students by offering to let them continue their degrees online, this is not always a realistic or appealing option. For example, some countries, such as Nigeria, do not recognize certain degrees obtained online (e.g. medical degrees). In line with this, a separate IOM study found that most TCNs crossing back into Ukraine were doing so to resume their studies or take exams, and thus to avoid interrupting their education and future career plans.<sup>103</sup>

TCNs appear to be conflicted about their plans in the long term. While 51 per cent reported a desire to return to Ukraine or their origin country, 30 per cent said they did not know yet if they would return, and 19 per cent said they cannot return in the long term. In principle, returning to Ukraine is legally possible for most TCNs who held a temporary or permanent residence permit before 24 February 2022, even if those permits have since expired. However, this does not extend to citizens of the Russian Federation, who are required to apply for a visa in the absence of a valid residence permit.<sup>104</sup>

102 See, for instance, the documents required for a work permit: Helpers Hungary, [“Work Permit Procedures in Hungary”](#), accessed 10 December 2024. See also Asylum Information Database (AIDA), [Temporary Protection: Hungary](#) (N.p.: AIDA, 2022).

103 IOM DTM, [Ukrainians and Third-Country Nationals Crossing Back to Ukraine, 2023 Regional Analysis, Special Focus on Quarter 4](#) (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2024); IOM DTM, [Displacement and Cross-Border Movement of Third-Country Nationals from Ukraine to Neighbouring Countries and in Europe](#) (Vienna: IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2023).

104 State Migration Service of Ukraine, [“Урядом урегульовано питання використання документів, строк дії яких закінчився у період дії воєнного стану”](#), updated 21 October 2022.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The European response to displacement from Ukraine has been unprecedented, with the historic first activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in the European Union and the creation of a similar form of protection in the Republic of Moldova. This period has also been marked by an outpouring of community support for refugees from Ukraine. Yet as the war has stretched on, uncertainty has grown about whether refugees will be able to return home and what will become of their status in EU countries when temporary protection expires in March 2026. This uncertainty has made it difficult for refugees to rebuild their lives and for policymakers to craft smart, forward-looking policies, whether focused on supporting refugees' local integration or their return to Ukraine in the long term.

The results of this study of refugees' return intentions and the factors shaping them can shed some light on this dilemma. An overwhelming majority of surveyed Ukrainian refugees (91%) said they intend to return home when it is safe to do so. And despite the ongoing war, 15 per cent planned to go back to Ukraine in the near future, likely for varying lengths of time – a finding in line with those of other surveys.<sup>105</sup> These return intentions, however, vary significantly by host country. For example, in Czechia and Poland, more than 40 per cent of respondents had concrete plans to return to Ukraine in the short term, compared to only 1 per cent in the Republic of Moldova. In contrast, desires to return in the long term were more stable across countries, varying between 80 per cent in Hungary and 98 per cent in the Republic of Moldova.

*While many Ukrainians hope to return to their home country one day, most do not think return is feasible any time soon.*

Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings that may be relevant for policymaking. First, while many Ukrainians hope to return to their home country one day, most do not think return is feasible any time soon. Given the ongoing fighting in some of Ukraine's regions, attacks on infrastructure, and the threat of mines and other explosives, this is hardly surprising. Indeed, the analysis finds a strong negative link between refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine and the intensity of fighting in their home regions. This has also been found in previous research (e.g. among Syrian refugees in Lebanon) and underscores the prominent role of security conditions in return decision-making.<sup>106</sup>

The findings of this study also suggest that host-country conditions and reception and integration policies play a role in shaping refugees' intentions and ability to return to Ukraine. Refugees residing in countries with more favourable economic conditions – such as lower poverty rates and higher GDP – tended to be slightly more likely to indicate a desire to return to Ukraine in the near future. Similarly, the provision of support to refugees from Ukraine did not appear to reduce their intentions to return. On the contrary, the analysis indicates that refugee intentions to return to Ukraine are somewhat higher in countries that provide more comprehensive educational, health and social support. The only exception to this pattern was labour market integration support; where this was more extensive, refugees were more likely to say they intend to

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine, Regional Intentions Report #4* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2023).

<sup>106</sup> Ala Alrababah et al., "How Do Refugees Decide Whether to Return Home?"; Immigration Policy Lab, accessed 20 August 2024.

stay in the host country. Finally, desires to return to Ukraine in the long term appear to be mostly unaffected by differing levels of support.

These findings suggest that, at least among respondents in the IOM survey, return intentions can be an expression of capabilities, meaning that enhanced reception and integration services can equip refugees with the stability and financial resources necessary for planning to return or make temporary visits. Labour market support was likely the exception to this rule because, in aiming to improve employment outcomes, it is more closely tied to long-term integration than other forms of assistance. Additionally, there may be an inverse relationship between the desire to return in the long term and the capacity to do so in the short term, at least in some countries. The analysis showed a moderate negative correlation (-0.5) between these two factors. This may be due to the fact that more comprehensive support can both allow for short-term mobility and simultaneously boost refugees' longer-term integration and desire to stay in their host country.

Besides these structural conditions in Ukraine and in European host countries, the analysis also finds individual-level characteristics to be strong predictors of return intentions. Notably, employment in the host country is linked to a lower desire to return to Ukraine, as is more time spent in the host country. The effect of employment in the host country appears to be particularly pronounced for refugees who were recently displaced. Over time, however, refugees who are and those who are not employed in the host country show more similar, declining intentions to return to Ukraine in the short term. There is also country-to-country variation in the effect of these individual-level factors. For example, while host-country employment had a large impact in Czechia and Poland, where many refugees described having plans to go back to Ukraine soon, no such effect was found in Bulgaria or the Republic of Moldova, where far fewer refugees had plans to return soon.

Across countries, women were more likely to voice intentions to return to Ukraine, both in the near future and long term. For men, returning to Ukraine – whether for a visit or longer term – is complicated by the policy mandating conscription to the army, which is likely to limit return movements for as long as martial law applies in the country. Refugees' reasons for returning also appear to be evolving over time.<sup>107</sup> Initially, returns were largely motivated by improved security conditions, but by 2024, more personal reasons, such as reuniting with friends or family, have become the main motivation for return.

It is important to consider these results within the context of long-standing mobility patterns, and more research is needed to better understand the links between past and present movements. For instance, it may be useful to view the high frequency with which refugees in Poland and Czechia described planning to return to Ukraine within the context of strong circular migration patterns that were established well before the displacement crisis began in 2022.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the IOM survey's questions do not make it possible to determine whether refugees who plan to return to Ukraine view that as a temporary or more permanent move. In other studies, data collected among returnees already in Ukraine have indicated that many of those who return (more than half by some counts) plan to only stay for a short period, and that others have

<sup>107</sup> This is based on additional information provided to the authors by IOM based on the Crossing Back Survey. For more information, see for instance: IOM DTM, *Ukraine Response*.

<sup>108</sup> Agata Górny, "All Circular but Different: Variation in Patterns of Ukraine-to-Poland Migration", *Population Space and Place* 23, no. 8 (2017): e2074.



not made up their mind about the nature of their return.<sup>109</sup> Even if not conclusive, these findings point to a likely pattern of ongoing transnational mobility, in which refugees may move back and forth between Ukraine and other countries. This would be similar to displacement in other contexts, such as from the Western Balkans and Afghanistan in the 1990s, where the post-conflict return of refugees has not been a one-time movement but instead developed into transnational living arrangements.<sup>110</sup>

These results all provide valuable insights into the patterns and drivers of return intentions among refugees from Ukraine, but they should be understood within their methodological limitations. First, the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region was not collected with the goal of creating a representative sample of each host country's population of refugees from Ukraine.

The analysis, therefore, uses no weighting and its findings can only speak to patterns among people who were sampled. Second, the statistical model used in this analysis accounts for differences in individual- and country-level characteristics, but it cannot pinpoint causal relationships. Third, while a key contribution of this study is its consideration not only of individual-level data but also host- and origin-country conditions and support measures for displaced Ukrainians, the policy index and survey data do not capture what support each individual survey respondent has received; thus, the analysis can speak to the general policy environment refugees find themselves in, but not to personal policy impacts. Finally, while the survey aims to capture concrete return intentions (e.g. by asking whether respondents have made preparations to travel), it is hard to tell the extent to which these intentions translate into actual return movements.<sup>111</sup> Despite these limitations, however, the findings of this analysis align with those of other studies indicating generally high intentions to return in the long term among refugees from Ukraine and of research from other displacement contexts highlighting the relatively insignificant role of host-country factors compared to other factors, such as origin-country conditions, in return decisions.<sup>112</sup>

In future research on return in the context of displacement from Ukraine, it could be useful to complement questions about return intentions with questions about the intended length of return trips to better distinguish between brief visits and more permanent types of return. It would also be valuable to follow up

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*These findings point to a likely pattern of ongoing transnational mobility, in which refugees may move back and forth between Ukraine and other countries.*

109 IOM DTM, *Ukraine Returns Report*.

110 Richard Black, Marita Eastmond and Saskia Gent, "Sustainable Return in the Balkans: Beyond Property Restitution and Policy", *International Migration* 44, no. 3 (August 2006): 5–166; Marieke Van Houte, Melissa Siegel and Tine Davids, "Deconstructing the Meanings of and Motivations for Return: An Afghan Case Study", *Comparative Migration Studies* 4, no. 21 (2016).

111 Previous evidence shows strong associations between intentions to return and observed movements, validating the usefulness of intentions data where flow data are not available. Moreover, the question in the IOM survey about refugees' intentions to return in the short term is formulated in such a way as to capture concrete plans and departure preparations within a three-month time horizon. As such, one could expect there to be relatively large overlap between these intentions and returns. In contrast, the survey question on intentions to return in the long term is formulated more hypothetically ("Do you intend to move back to Ukraine when it is safe to do so?") and therefore does not capture concrete preparatory actions, and respondents' plans are more likely to evolve over time as they continue to assess their options based on shifting circumstances in their origin and host country. See Wanner, "Can Migrants' Emigration Intentions Predict Their Actual Behaviors?"

112 Iza Chmielewska-Kalińska, Beata Dudek and Paweł Strzelecki, *The Living and Economic Situation of Ukrainian Refugees in Poland* (Warsaw: National Bank of Poland, 2022); UNHCR, *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine #1*; Alrababah et al., "The Dynamics of Refugee Return".

with respondents at least once after the initial survey to better gauge the link between return intentions and actual behaviour. Finally, future research could focus on the transnational mobility patterns that are likely to emerge among Ukrainian refugees, especially at a household level, such as circular movements or the partial return of some family members. Such patterns will have implications for policies relating to residency, re-entry and remote work, among other things.

Based on these findings, European and Ukrainian policymakers, international organizations and civil-society groups may wish to consider the following recommendations:

- ▶ **Continue to support refugees from Ukraine in ways that both enhance local inclusion and foster informed decision-making about potential return.** As this analysis has shown, refugees in host countries that provide more comprehensive support have, on average, higher intentions to return to Ukraine in the near future. Ensuring that refugees have effective access to services can enable them to make more informed and empowered mobility decisions, ranging from return to circular mobility options, among others. Measures to promote skill-building, such as through continued access to training and education, should also be a priority, to strengthen refugees' ability to contribute to local labour markets in the near term and to broaden their future employment options, whether they return to Ukraine or remain abroad. By fostering the inclusion of displaced Ukrainians, these types of assistance can lead to more positive outcomes for both refugees and the communities in which they live. And as the war in Ukraine stretches on and refugees spend more time in their host countries, this can enhance social cohesion and, for Ukrainians who ultimately stay long term, provide a solid foundation for their integration and reduce the level of additional support they need in the future.
- ▶ **Factor the diversity of refugees' mobility patterns into policy and programmatic decisions.** Refugees from Ukraine may adopt a variety of mobility strategies, whether choosing to return to Ukraine, stay in their host countries, move onward or travel back and forth between countries. Policy and programmatic discussions around return should reflect this diversity of mobility options, and support measures should be designed accordingly. For instance, EU Member States could be more welcoming of temporary protection holders' temporary return to Ukraine and re-entry into their host countries and support flexible residency in the context of such cyclical movement. In addition to reflecting emerging mobility trends, these options should be considered in light of Ukraine's EU candidate status, with a focus on fostering closer cooperation and strengthening ties.
- ▶ **Learn from the experiences of returnees, as well as the evolving needs and intentions of refugees abroad, to provide an evidence base for future reintegration and recovery initiatives.** Refugees are already going back to Ukraine, some for brief visits and others for longer periods. Besides providing support to these returnees, European authorities and international organizations such as IOM should monitor any challenges that returnees may face upon return, so these findings can inform future voluntary return, reintegration and recovery initiatives. In addition, these stakeholders should continue to monitor the situation of refugees in host countries, as well as their return intentions and movements, in order to adapt their policy and programmatic responses accordingly.

- ▶ **Address the status of third-country nationals displaced from Ukraine.** This group has faced significant legal and socioeconomic uncertainty, and in some cases, outright discrimination. For many TCNs, returning to Ukraine is not a viable option. Simultaneously, returning to their countries of origin may be difficult or unsafe. Although this group constitutes a small share of the displaced population, it is worth reflecting on the uneven treatment and unique challenges they have experienced, which in some cases have left them without legal status and/or prompted secondary movements. The priority should be to improve the legal certainty of TCNs who do not benefit from temporary protection in their host countries. Given that many EU countries' asylum systems are overstretched, this could involve helping displaced TCNs apply for other legal statuses for which they qualify; for example, they could assist TCNs who were international students in Ukraine with applying for a visa to study in their host country.

Return movements from Europe to Ukraine are already underway, and more refugees will consider returning once the war ends. Monitoring and understanding the interplay of personal, host-country and origin-country factors that influence refugees' return intentions will make it possible to develop more tailored strategies for return, reintegration and reconstruction. Ultimately, the displacement crisis has created links between Ukraine and the European Union that will persist and shape the way European and Ukrainian policymakers think about mobility in the region, especially with Ukraine being granted EU candidate status in June 2022. In this context, return to Ukraine may be considered less as a one-off event and more as part of a growing mobility relationship that will need to be managed and nurtured to benefit both Ukraine and its neighbours, including by supporting reconstruction efforts.

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*The displacement crisis has created links between Ukraine and the European Union that will persist and shape the way European and Ukrainian policymakers think about mobility in the region.*

## Appendix. Overview of Study Data and Methodology

The survey data used in this analysis were collected by IOM and provided to researchers at MPI Europe, who cleaned, edited and merged the data with secondary data. This appendix provides details about the original data, the cleaning process, the sub-sample used in the analysis, and additional information on relevant variables used throughout the analysis, including in the construction of a policy index.

### Dataset

The data used for this report come from IOM's Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region.<sup>113</sup> The overall dataset contains 68,745 surveys completed by refugees from Ukraine (including both Ukrainian nationals and TCNs) who had fled Ukraine and were either settled in or transiting through the survey country. Surveys were conducted face-to-face at various locations, such as transport hubs, reception centres, hotels and malls, using non-probability convenience sampling without the addition of weights. Data were collected via the KoboToolbox platform.<sup>114</sup> Considering the lack of reliable data on refugees from Ukraine across each survey location, the data should not be considered representative of this refugee population.

Survey respondents were adults over the age of 18 who had not participated in any other needs and intentions survey in the three months prior to the survey date. Surveys were conducted from 16 April 2022 through the end of 2023 and were completed in the following twelve counties: Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Türkiye. All questions in the surveys were written in English, Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian.

In addition to the IOM survey data, MPI Europe researchers added country-level indicators, information about support available to people displaced from Ukraine, and information about respondents' oblasts of origin in Ukraine. (See Table A-4 and A-5 for further details on the secondary data used in the analysis.)

### Sample selection

Based on the data provided by IOM, the MPI Europe researchers selected a subgroup of respondents for inclusion in the analysis described in this report. That final dataset consists of the survey responses of approximately 60,800 Ukrainian refugees and 1,700 TCNs who were present in one of 10 countries of assessment: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania or Slovakia. Responses from Belarus and Türkiye were not included in the sample due to the study's focus on countries that have implemented the TPD (in the European Union) or a similar status (such as the national temporary protection scheme in the Republic of Moldova).

All surveys within this sample were conducted between 16 April 2022 and 27 December 2023, and only respondents who reported being initially displaced following the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian

<sup>113</sup> Thematic reports from the IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region can be found here: IOM DTM, "Ukraine Response", accessed 20 June 2024. A dashboard showcasing all the findings can be found IOM DTM, "Ukraine Regional Response: Needs, Intentions, and Border Crossings", accessed 20 June 2024.

<sup>114</sup> KoboToolbox, "Home", accessed 20 June 2024.

Federation starting on 24 February 2022 were included. The majority of the data analysis presented in Section 4 includes only people who reported holding Ukrainian nationality, apart from Section 4.D., which looks at trends among survey respondents who were TCNs displaced from Ukraine.

The characteristics for the sample of Ukrainian refugees are shown in Table A-1.

**TABLE A-1**  
**Select characteristics of Ukrainian refugees in the final survey sample**

Characteristic	Sample
Total number of respondents	60,831
Gender	82% female
Average age	43 years old (min: 18, med: 40, max: 99)
Parental status	50% had children under age 18, and 91% of parents of minor children had those children with them
Employment status	33% employed
Education	52% had a tertiary education
Top five oblasts of origin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Odeska oblast (26%)</li> <li>2 Mykolaivska oblast (9%)</li> <li>3 Kharkivska oblast (9%)</li> <li>4 Khersonska oblast (6%)</li> <li>5 Donetska oblast (6%)</li> </ol>
Top five countries of assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Republic of Moldova (29%)</li> <li>2 Romania (21%)</li> <li>3 Czechia (14%)</li> <li>4 Poland (10%)</li> <li>5 Slovakia (7%)</li> </ol>
Average distance from oblast of origin to country of assessment	705.42 km (min: 118.36, med: 653.08, max: 1,716.8)
Average time since displacement	249 days (min: 0, med: 238, max: 663)
Median date of displacement	9 June 2022
Median date of assessment	14 October 2022

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

## Statistical model

To estimate the relative influence of individual and country-level characteristics, this study uses a probit regression model to study respondents' intent to return to Ukraine in the short term and in the long term. Probit regression models are used to predict binary outcomes, in this case the decision to return to Ukraine or not.<sup>115</sup> The model uses robust standard errors and indicator variables of the survey countries while estimating the effects of individual factors in order to reduce the influence and variability of surveying done across 10 countries.<sup>116</sup>

115 For more information on the uses of probit versus standard regression models, see Christoph Hanck, Martin Arnold, Alexander Gerber and Martin Schmelzer, "11.2 Probit and Logit Regression", in *Introduction to Econometrics with R*, updated 13 February 2024.

116 Using probit models to estimate effects on probability to return, using both country-level and individual-level variables, has proven valid in other studies involving surveys of Ukrainians. See Sologoub, "Return or Stay?"

## Outcome variables

This study focuses on two outcome variables that indicate a respondent's intention and desire to return to Ukraine in the short or long term.

**Intentions to return in the short term:** This outcome variable is *Intent to Move to Ukraine*. In the survey, this variable stems from the question “Do you intend to move to another country or location in [survey country] in the near future?”. Survey enumerators were instructed that respondents who indicate a movement intention must have concrete plans to move, such as bus tickets, or arrangements with their current job to move. The outcome variable *Intent to Move to Ukraine* is thus binary, where 1 corresponds to the intentions to return to Ukraine and 0 corresponds to all other cases (i.e. those who intend to remain in their current location, move within their host country or move to another country that is not Ukraine). Overall, this outcome variable had about 58,400 responses, with about 8,700 responses being coded as 1 (intending to move to Ukraine) and the rest as 0. That is, 15 per cent of respondents indicated an intention to return to Ukraine in the short term.

**Intentions to return in the long term:** This outcome variable is *Desire to Move to Ukraine*. In the survey, this variable stems from the question “Do you plan to return to Ukraine/country of origin when it is safe to do so?”. The outcome variable is binary, where 1 was coded when a respondent replied “yes, Ukraine” and 0 when a respondent replied “no”. Overall, this outcome variable had about 19,400 responses, with about 17,600 of those responses being coded as 1 (desiring to return to Ukraine) and the rest as 0. Thus, 91 per cent indicated a desire to return in the long term.

Another outcome of interest was the factors motivating respondents to intend to return to Ukraine, the variable *Reasons for Return*. In the survey, this variable stems from the question “If going back to Ukraine, why?”. This variable had about 3,100 responses, and respondents were able to choose multiple responses from a list of options and open field answers. To capture similar responses, the MPI Europe researchers recoded these answers into the five categories shown in Table A–2.

TABLE A–2

### Categories constructed to capture the variety of return motives

Categories constructed for the analysis	Original answer categories in the survey
Host-country support and reception	Not enough resources/money for living costs; could not get access to education; could not get access to humanitarian assistance; could not find shelter/accommodation; experienced discrimination or integration challenges; humanitarian assistance has expired or will expire soon
Family reasons	Reuniting with family members in Ukraine; taking family members to safety; care responsibilities
Improved security situation in origin community/Ukraine	Situation is better in my origin place/region; situation is better in Ukraine
Employment reasons	Found work in Ukraine; work in essential services; could not get a job
Short-term visits	Returning for belongings; accessing health care; checking on property; shopping; helping family get to the border; retrieving documents

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

## Explanatory variables

Multiple individual- and country-level variables were used to determine the drivers of refugees' intentions to return to Ukraine. Individual-level variables were derived from the survey, while country-level variables were developed based on secondary sources.

Table A–3 shows the individual-level variables used in this analysis. Variables found to be statistically significant in a univariate regression with the study's outcome variables were later used in regressions with country-level variables. As such, not all of the variables listed in the table were included in the final analysis results; those excluded were found to either be not statistically significant univariately or were highly correlated with other variables.

**TABLE A–3**  
**Description of individual-level explanatory variables**

Characteristic	Original survey question
Gender	2.5 <i>What is your gender?</i>
Respondent age	2.7 <i>What is your age?</i>
Education	2.10 <i>What is the highest level of education that you have completed?</i>
Time since displacement	Date of the survey 3.4 <i>When did you leave Ukraine? If you do not remember the exact date, then please give an estimate.</i>
Time since arrival	Date of the survey 4.1 <i>When did you enter [survey country]? (date)</i>
Number of children in group	4.9 <i>How many children are in age group 0–4 years – female?</i> 4.9 <i>How many children are in age group 0–4 years – male?</i> 4.9 <i>How many children are in age group 5–17 years – female?</i> 4.9 <i>How many children are in age group 5–17 years – male?</i>
Number of older people in group	4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 60+ years – female? (2023 only)</i> 4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 60+ years – male? (2023 only)</i> 4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 65+ years – female? (2022 only)</i> 4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 65+ years – male? (2022 only)</i>
Proportion of dependants (children and older people) in group	Characteristic: Number of children in group Characteristic: Number of older people in group 4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 18–59 years – female?</i> 4.10 <i>How many adults (including the respondent) are in age group 18–59 years – male?</i>
Officially employed in country of assessment	6.4.1 <i>If employed, what is the best description of your work arrangement?</i>

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, conducted between April 2022 and December 2023.

The variables in Table A–4 were taken from secondary sources and merged into the IOM survey dataset for each survey country. Note that some variables were not included in the final analysis results; those excluded were found to either be not statistically significant univariately or were highly correlated with other variables.

**TABLE A–4**  
**Description of country-of-assessment explanatory variables**

Indicator	Unit	Source
Unemployment rate, adults age 25+ (2022)	Percentages (0–100)	International Labour Organisation, “Unemployment Rate by Sex and Age, ILO Modelled Estimates, May 2024 (%) - Annual”, accessed May 2024.
Ukrainian diaspora (2021)	Count of Ukrainian citizens holding a valid residence permit in the country of assessment before the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, per 1,000 inhabitants	Eurostat, “First Permits by Reason, Length of Validity and Citizenship [migr_resfirst]”, accessed May 2024.
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, expressed using purchasing power parity in current prices (2022)	US dollars (in billions)	International Monetary Fund, “GDP per Capita, Current Prices”, accessed May 2024.
Gini index (2021)	Numeric index (0–100)	Eurostat, “Gini Coefficient of Equivalised Disposable Income by Age [ilc_di12]”, accessed May 2024.
Poverty rate (2021)	Percentages (0–100)	World Bank, “Poverty and Inequality Indicators”, accessed May 2024.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the sources named in the table.



TABLE A-5

**Description of oblast-of-origin explanatory variables**

Characteristic	Variable unit	Source	Notes
Gross regional product (GRP) (2021)	Millions of Ukrainian hryvnias	State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, " <a href="#">Economic Statistics / Macroeconomic Statistics / Trends in Business Activity</a> "; accessed May 2024.	Data exclude the areas under occupation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the City of Sevastopol, and in the Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts.
War intensity	Total count of recorded battles and explosions in oblast of origin, from February 2022 to the month of assessment	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, " <a href="#">Data &amp; Tools</a> "; accessed May 2024.	A cumulative sum of battles and explosions / remote violence was calculated in Microsoft Excel, and an edited CSV file was then brought into Stata.
Distance from oblast of origin to the host country	Kilometres (km)	IOM Survey with Refugees in the Ukraine Response Region, based on the information: - County of assessment - Question 3.1 <i>What was the usual oblast or place of residence in Ukraine before you left?</i>	Distance was calculated in the geospatial analysis software QGIS and represents the linear distance in kilometres between the geographic middle of the respondent's oblast of origin and the geographic middle of the respondent's country of assessment. This was calculated in the WGS 84 projection.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the sources named in the table.

### Policy index and sub-indices on support measures for refugees from Ukraine

In addition to using information collected through the IOM survey and country-level information taken from external sources, this analysis used an overall policy index as well as several sub-indices to capture the level of support provided by host countries to refugees from Ukraine, chiefly through their implementation of the TPD (or in the case of the Republic of Moldova, a national temporary protection scheme). The aim of this policy index is to capture differences in the levels of support available to refugees from Ukraine in different policy areas and across countries, and to test whether the support influences refugees' decisions about returning to Ukraine. The index contains information on support in five policy areas: health care, the labour market, social welfare, housing and education.

In order to compile information on the support available and to score it, the MPI Europe researchers mainly used two sources of information: a report by the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) on the socioeconomic rights of beneficiaries of temporary protection<sup>117</sup> and a European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) information sheet on European countries' responses to the arrival of displaced people fleeing Ukraine.<sup>118</sup> The AIDA report provides information and analysis on the implementation of the TPD and similar national temporary protection regimes in 2022 in 19 EU Member States and 3 non-EU countries. However, only 4 out of the 10 countries examined in this study (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania) were described in the AIDA report. Consequently, additional sources were used to complement this information.

117 ECRE, *Access to Socio-Economic Rights for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection* (Brussels: ECRE, 2022).

118 ECRE, "Measures in Response to the Arrival of Displaced People Fleeing the War in Ukraine".

The second main source, the ECRE information sheet, cover all 10 countries in the analysis. This information sheet examines the implementation of the TPD and equivalent national policies. However, unlike the AIDA report, the ECRE information sheet does not use a harmonised methodology.

Finally, information that was not available through either the AIDA or ECRE publications was drawn from the European Union Agency for Asylum country-specific booklets providing information for displaced people from Ukraine.<sup>119</sup> These cover all countries in the analysis apart from Estonia. Thus, information on Estonia was drawn from the Estonian government's Crisis Management System website.<sup>120</sup>

To score and compare the information gathered, the researchers used a scoring sheet. Each of the five policy area was assessed using two or three of the following five indicators, depending on what information was relevant and available: eligibility based on the legal framework (i.e. legally, who is the target group of this service?); ease of access (i.e. to what extent is access to services facilitated?); extent of service (i.e. does the service provide basic care or more comprehensive support?); financial coverage (i.e. to what extent are services to be paid for by the state?); and time limitations (i.e. are there any time limits on access to the service?). The indicators were scored on a scale of 0 to 2 points, where 0 = restricted, 1 = moderate and 2 = inclusive. Finally, composite scores were calculated by taking the average of the indicator values available in each policy area and a total score for each country.

**TABLE A-6**  
**Scoring of indicators per policy area in this study's policy index**

Policy area and indicator		Score		
		0	1	2
<b>Health care</b>	Eligibility	Restricted	Moderate	Inclusive
	Extent	None/basic	Moderate	Comprehensive
<b>Labour market support</b>	Eligibility	Restricted	Moderate	Inclusive
	Ease	None	Moderate	Broad facilitation
	Extent	None/basic	Moderate	Comprehensive
<b>Social welfare</b>	Extent	None/basic	Moderate	Comprehensive
	Financial	None	Moderate	Comprehensive
<b>Housing</b>	Eligibility	Restricted	Moderate	Inclusive
	Extent	None/basic	Moderate	Comprehensive
	Time	< 3 months	3 to 6 months	> 6 months
<b>Education</b>	Eligibility	Restricted	Moderate	Inclusive
	Ease	None	Moderate	Broad facilitation
	Extent	None/basic	Moderate	Comprehensive

*Note:* Composite scores were calculated by taking the average of the indicator values available in each policy area and a total score for each country.

*Source:* Authors' elaboration.

119 European Union Agency for Asylum, "EUAA Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine – EU+ Countries Information for Displaced People from Ukraine", accessed 20 June 2024.

120 Republic of Estonia, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, "Crisis Management", updated 30 August 2023.

## About the Authors

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Ravenna Sohst is a Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe), where she conducts research and policy analysis on European migration policies, the links between development and migration, return migration and reintegration, labour mobility and remittances. Previously, she worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre and at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Ms Sohst holds a PhD from the University of Luxembourg, an MSc from the United Nations MERIT University/Maastricht University in public policy and human development, and a BA in political science from the University of Freiburg and the Institut d'Études Politiques d'Aix-en-Provence.

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### **TINO TIRADO**

Tino Tirado was a Research Assistant at MPI, where he conducted data analysis and research for the International Programme. His work supported projects examining post-pandemic mobility policies and trends and the intersection of climate change, migration and urbanization/localization.

Prior to joining MPI, Mr Tirado was a graduate student researcher for the Center for US–Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), where he focused on perceptions of discrimination among Central American migrants in Tijuana, Mexico, as well as historical election results and poverty indicators across Mexican states. Mr Tirado holds a master's degree in public policy from the UCSD School of Global Policy and Strategy, with an emphasis on programme design and evaluation, and a bachelor's degree in political science from UCSD.

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### **LUCÍA SALGADO**

Lucía Salgado was an Associate Policy Analyst at MPI Europe, where she focused on European policies related to migrant integration, asylum and the reintegration of returned migrants. Her work on this research study was completed and approved for publication while at the Institute, before June 16, 2024. Prior to joining MPI Europe, Ms Salgado worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs within the European Commission, and the Consulate General of Spain in Melbourne. She also interned with the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Jasmiijn Slootjes is an Associate Director with MPI Europe, primarily working on immigrant integration. Her research areas include migrant health, evidence-informed policymaking, migrants' access to services, integration policies, receiving-society responses to migration and the use of innovative research methods to study migration.

Before joining MPI Europe, Ms Slootjes was Executive Director of the Berkeley Interdisciplinary Migration Initiative at the University of California, Berkeley. Previously, she completed her PhD research on how migrants overcome health problems as obstacles to labour market integration. During her PhD, she was Coordinator of the Migration Diversity Centre and a Pat Cox Fellow at the Migration Policy Group. She also studied the impact of budget cuts on integration courses and migrant language attainment at the Municipality of Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Ms Slootjes holds a PhD in sociology (migration studies) from VU University Amsterdam, an MSc in migration studies from Utrecht University, and a BA in political science and international relations from Utrecht University.

## Acknowledgements

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The authors are grateful to their Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and MPI Europe colleagues for their support, including Camille Le Coz for her peer review; Lauren Shaw for her advice and careful edits; and Lukas Boeckxstaens, Rosangela Caleprico, Ben Ginsburg Hix and Chiara Lonoce for their research assistance.

The authors also thank colleagues at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). For their support with the data, review of the analysis and support with the contract, the authors thank Ivona Zakoska-Todorovska, Erin Autumn Neale and Yaroslav Smirnov. For their additional review and feedback, the authors thank Margherita Vismara, Marina Cakic, Iryna Rozka, Teuta Grazhdani, Oleksandra Slobodian, Cara Kielwein and Iryna Loktieva.



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